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interviewed by
Lloyd Richards

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November 24:

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March 9:

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interviewed by John Simon

March 23:

Gail Godwin

interviewed by John Irving

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October 13:

Athol Fugard

October 28:

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November 25:

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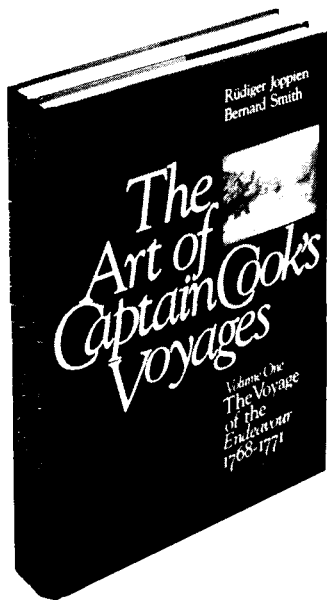
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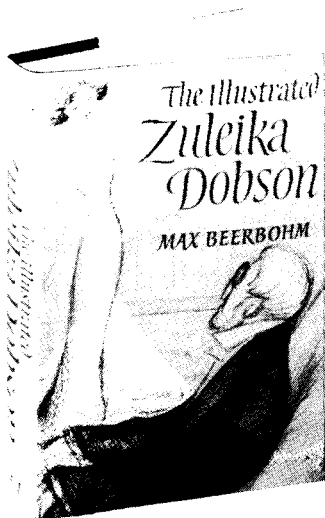


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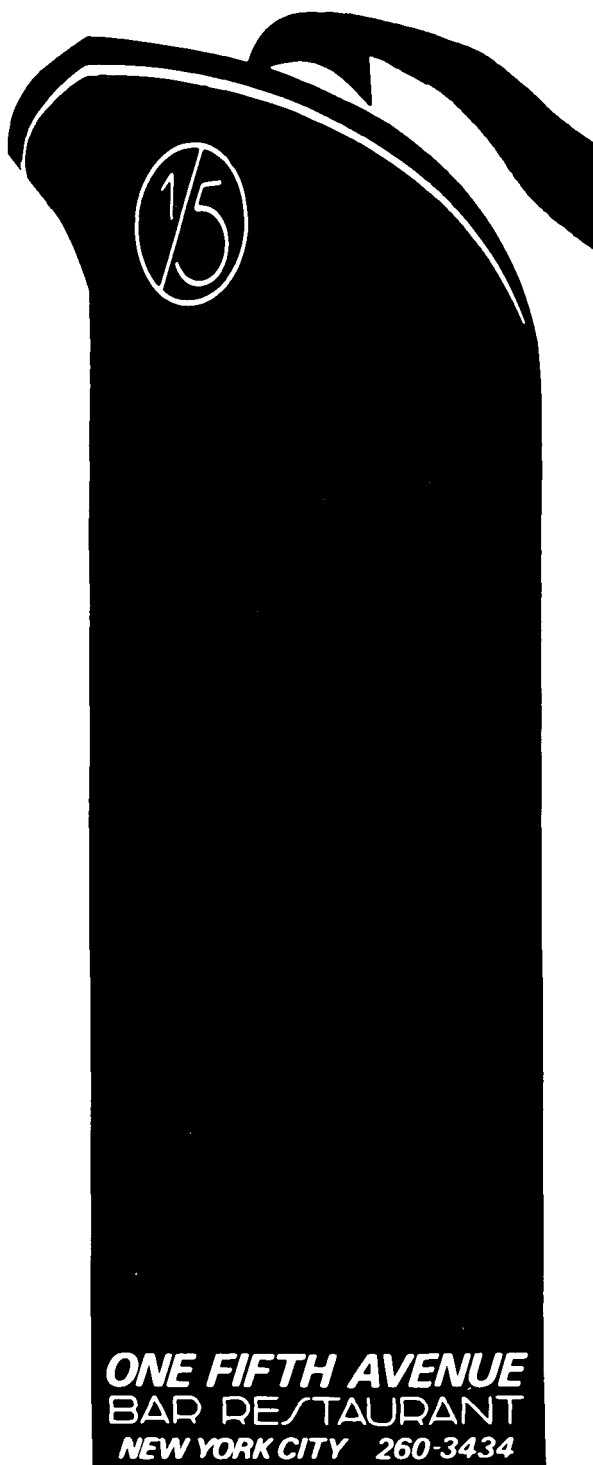
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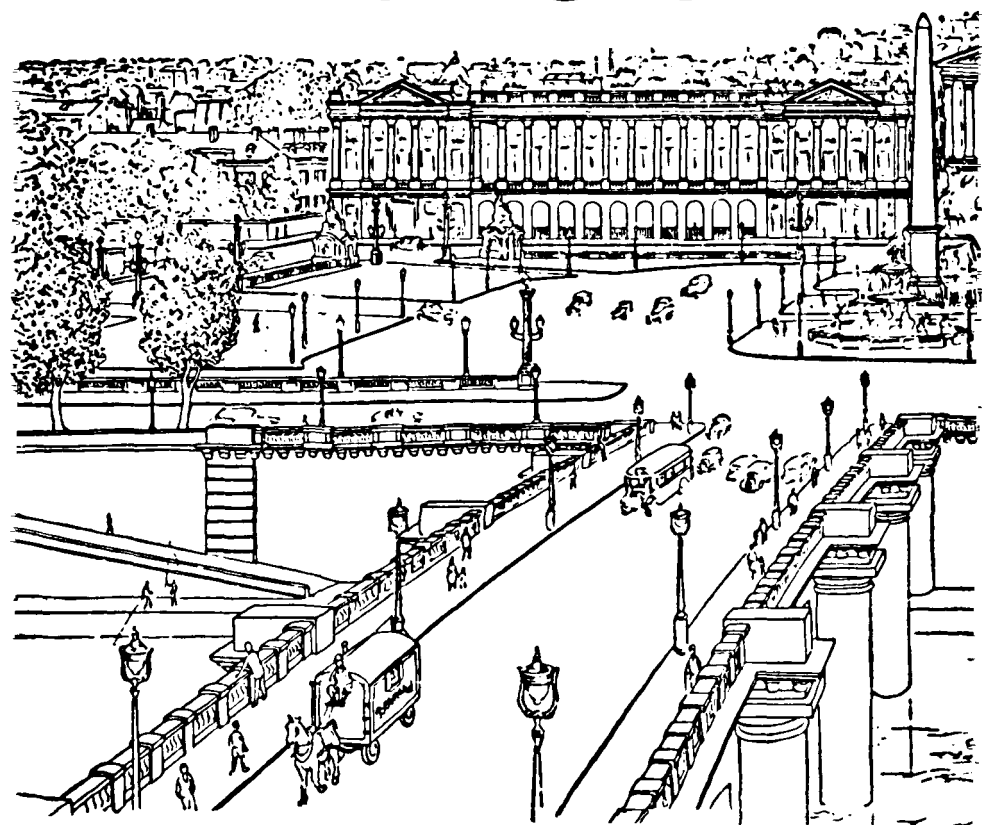
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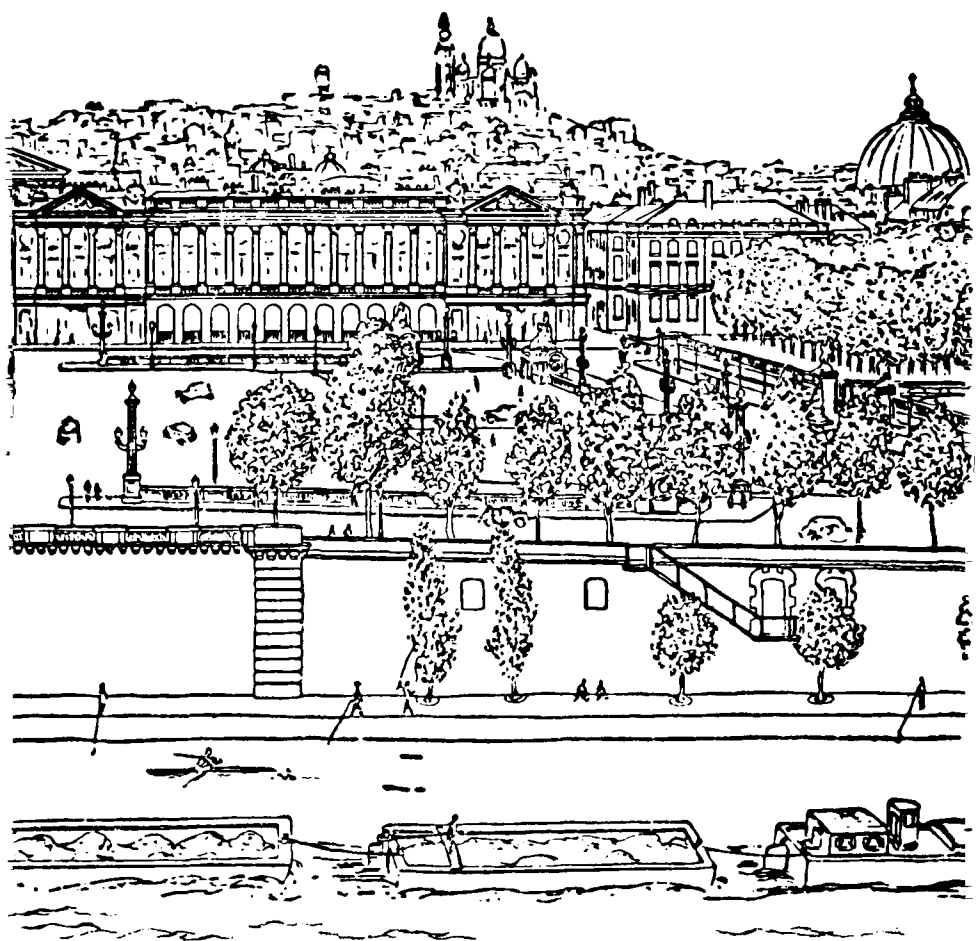
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The Paris Review is pleased to announce that **Michael Covino** is the 1985 winner of the Aga Khan Fiction Prize for his story "Monologue of the Movie Mogul," which appeared in issue #94, and that **Stephen Dixon** is the 1985 winner of the John Train Humor Prize for his story "Goodbye to Goodbye," which appears in this issue.

Goodbye to Goodbye

Stephen Dixon

“Goodbye,” and she goes. I stay there, holding the gift I was about to give her. Had told her I was giving her. This afternoon, on the phone. I said “I’d like to come over with something for you.” She said “How come?” I said “Your birthday.” She said “You know I don’t like to be reminded of those, but come ahead if you want, around seven, okay?” I came. She answered the door. From the door I could see a man sitting on a couch in the living room. She said “Come in.” I came in, gave her my coat, had the gift in a shopping bag the woman’s store had put it in. “I have a friend here, I hope you don’t mind,” she said. “Me? Mind? Don’t be silly—but how good a friend?” “My business,” she said, “do you mind?” “No, of course not, why should I? Because you’re right, it is your business.” We went into the living room. The man got up. “Don’t get up,” I said. “It’s no bother,” he said. “How do you do? Mike Sliven,” and he stuck out his hand. “Jules Dorsey,” and I stuck out mine. “Like a drink, Jules?” she said, as we shook hands, and I said “Yes, what do you have?” “Beer, wine, a little brandy, but I’d like to save that if you don’t mind.” “Why should I mind? Though something hard is what I think I’d like. Beer.”

"Light or dark?" she said. "Whatever you have most of," I said. "I have six-packs of both." "Then . . . dark," I said. "I feel like a dark. Suddenly I feel very dark. Only kidding, of course," I said to Mike and then turned to her so she'd also see I was only kidding. She went to the kitchen. Mike said "Now I remember your name. Arlene's spoken of you." "I'm sure she had only the very best things to say of me too." "She did and she didn't," he said, "but you're kidding again, no doubt." "Oh, I'm kidding, all right, or maybe I'm not. Say, who the hell are you anyway and what the hell are you doing here? I thought Arlene was still only seeing me," and I grabbed him off the couch. He was much bigger than I, but didn't protest. "Where's your coat and hat?" I said and he said "I didn't come with a hat and my coat's over there, in the closet." "Then we're going to get it and you're going to leave with it." I clutched his elbow and started walking him to the closet. Arlene came into the living room and said "Jules, what are you doing?—and where are you going, Mike?" "I think out," he said. "Out," I said. "I came over to give you a gift and take you to dinner for your birthday and later to spend the night with you here or at my place or even at a great hotel if you wish, and god-damnit that's what I'm going to do." "What is it with you, Jules?—I've never heard you talk like that before." "Do you mind?" I said. "No, I kind of like it. And Mike. Are you going to leave when someone tells you to, just like that?" "I think I have to," he said, "since if there's one thing I don't like to do in life it's to get into or even put up a fight, especially when I see there's no chance of winning it." I opened the closet. He got his coat. I opened the front door and he left. I locked the door. Bolted it, just in case he already had the keys. Then I turned around. Arlene was standing in the living room holding my glass of beer. She came into the foyer with it. I didn't move, just let her come. "You still want this?" she said. "No, the cognac," I said. "It's brandy but good imported brandy." "Then the brandy," I said. "How do you want it?" "With ice." "Coming right up," and she went back into the kitchen. I followed her. She was reaching for the brandy on a cupboard shelf above her, had her back to me. I got up be-

hind her—she didn't seem to know I was there—put my arms around her, pressed into her. She turned her head around, kissed me. We kissed. I started to undress her right there.

That's not the way it happened, of course. The way it happened was like this. I did come over with a gift, it wasn't her birthday, a man named Mike was there when I thought she'd be alone, she said he was a good friend, "In fact, the man I'm sleeping with now." "Oh," I said. "Well, I still have this gift for you so you might as well take it." She said "Really, it wouldn't be fair." Mike came into the foyer, introduced himself. "Mike Ivory," he said. "Jules Dorsey," I said. "Maybe I shouldn't stay." "No, Jules, come in and have a drink. What'll you have?" "What do you got?" I said. "I don't know. What do we have?" he said to Arlene. She said "Beer—light and dark—wine—red and white—scotch, vodka, rye, bourbon, gin, brandy and I think there's a little of that cognac left, and all the mixers to go with them, besides other nonalcoholic stuff if you're suddenly into that." "Come on, Jules drinks his share," Mike said, "or at least will with us here." "I drink, all right," I said, "though not that much. But tonight I'd like a double of that cognac you said you have, if you've enough for a double." "Why not—right, Arlene? Want me to get it?" "It's okay, I'll get it," she said, "but what's a double?" "Just double whatever you normally pour," he said. "If there's so little in the bottle that you don't have enough to double what you normally pour, empty the whole thing in his glass." "I just usually pour, I don't know how much," she said. "So do it that way," he said, "but double it." "Fill half a regular juice glass," I said, "and then put some ice in it, if you don't mind?" "Ice in one of the best cognacs there is?" he said. "No way, sir. Sorry." "Then make it your worst cognac," I said, "but ice in it, please? I feel like a cognac and I feel like a double and I feel like I want that double cognac ice-cold." "Sorry—really," he said. "We only have one cognac and it's one of the rarest there is. Gin, vodka, bourbon, scotch, even the beer, light or dark, I'll put ice in for you, and the wine, either one, too. But not that cognac or even the brandy. They're both too good. I'm telling you the truth when I say I couldn't sleep right tonight if I knew I was instrumental or helpful in any

way or even allowed it, just stood by and allowed ice in cognac or brandy when I knew that just by saying something I might be able to stop it." "Listen, you," I said and grabbed his neck with one hand. He swung at me. I ducked and hit him in the stomach, he fell forward and I clipped him on the back. He went down. I put my foot under his chest and nudged him with it and he turned himself over on his back. I looked at Arlene. Her hands covered her eyes but she seemed to be peeking through the finger cracks. I said to Mike "Probably Arlene won't like this but I'm going to give you to ten to get your coat and hat and—" "I didn't come with a coat and hat," he said. "Then ten just to get the hell out of here." "Jules, this is awful," Arlene said, not looking alarmed or frightened or really upset or anything like that. "I don't care. It's what I suddenly felt like doing even if I didn't feel that right about doing it so that's what I did. Now get, buddy," I said to Mike. "One, two, three . . ." He got up, held his stomach as he went to the front door. By the count of eight he was out of the apartment. She said "I hate it when anyone does that to people, but I think deep inside I loved it when you did it to him. Not because it was Mike. He's very nice. It's just that you were, well—I've never seen you like that before. I don't know what that makes me, but come here, you rat." I came to her. She mussed my hair, with her other hand slipped off one and then the other of her shoes. "Shall we do it here or in the bedroom?" "Here," I said, "or the opening part of it, but first let me lock the front door."

That's not the way it happened either. It happened like this. Arlene's my wife. We've been married for three years. We lived together for two years before that. We have a nine-month-old son. During dinner Arlene said she wanted a divorce. Our son was asleep in his room. I'd just put the main dish and side courses on the table. I dropped my fork. I was in what could be called a state of shock. I don't like that term but for now it'll have to do. Figuratively and maybe in some way literally—technically, scientifically—I was in a state of shock. I didn't move for I don't know how long. A minute, two, three. Just stared at my fork on my plate. Till the moment she told me this I thought that though we had some problems in our marriage, they were

manageable and correctable and not untypical and that we were serious at working them out. All in all I felt we were very compatible in most ways and that the marriage was a successful one and getting better all the time. Arlene had said it several times—many times—too. About once a month she used to tell me that she loved me and loved being married to me, and about once a month, and not just after she told me this, I'd tell her the same thing. I meant it and felt she meant it. I had no reason to believe she didn't mean it. This is the truth. Sometimes out of the blue she'd say "I love you, Jules." Sometimes I'd answer "You do?" and she'd say "Truly love you." We could be in a taxi and she'd turn to me and say it. Or walking to a movie theater or in front of a theater during the intermission of a play and she'd break off whatever either of us was saying to say it. At that dinner, which I cooked—it was a good dinner, a chicken dish, rice cooked to perfection—something she taught me how to do—a baked zucchini dish, a great salad, a good bottle of wine, crabmeat cocktail to begin with, two drinks with cheese on crackers before we sat down, we had made love the previous night and we both said later on that it was one of the best acts of lovemaking we'd ever had, our son was wonderful and we loved being parents though admitted it was tough and tiring at times, both of us were making a pretty good income for the first time in our relationship so as a family we were financially sound, nothing was wrong or just about nothing, everything or just about everything was right, so that's why I say I was suddenly in a state of shock. "You want a divorce?" I finally said after she said "So what do you have to say about what I said before?" "Yes," she said, "a divorce." "Whatever for?" "Because I don't love you anymore," she said. "But just last week or the week before that you said you loved me more than you ever have, or as much as you ever have, you said." "I was lying," she said. "You wouldn't lie about something like that." "I'm telling you, I was lying," she said. "Why don't you love me anymore?" "Because I love someone else." "You love someone else?" "That's what I just said, I love someone else." "Since when?" I said. "Since months." "And you stopped loving me the minute you started loving him?" "No, a couple of months earlier." "Why?"

"I don't know. I asked myself the same thing lots of times and all I could come up with was that I felt rather than knew why. You fall in, you fall out. You fall out, you fall in. Though this time I'm sure I've fallen in forever, since the feeling has never been stronger." "I can't believe it," I said. "Believe it. I've been having the most intense affair possible with a man I met at work—someone you don't know—and he's married but will get a divorce to be with me, just as I'm going to get a divorce to be with him." "But the children, I mean, the child," I said. "We'll work it out. We were always good at working things out in the past that most other couples never could, and we'll work this out too. I'll take Kenneth for the time being and when he's completely weaned you can have him whenever you like for as long as you like so long as it doesn't disrupt his life too much." "But just leaving me, divorcing me, breaking up this family, will disrupt his life," I said. "I'm sorry, I didn't want to, I in fact tried not to, but the force of the feeling I have for this man and he for me—" "What's his name?" "What's the difference?" "Just tell me his name? Maybe I do know him." "Even if you did, which you don't, nothing you could do or say—" "His name, please, his name? I just want to know what and whom I'm up against." "What could you know by just his name? If it was Butch or Spike or Mike, would it make you feel more or less confident that I'm not very much in love with him and that I'm not going to divorce you to marry him?" "Is it Mike?" "It isn't but you know that wasn't my point. All right, it is Mike," when I continued to stare at her as if I'd caught her fibbing, "but so what? Mickey, Michael or Mike, it's just a given name." "Mike what?" I said. "Now that's enough, Jules. I don't want you starting trouble." "I won't start anything. I just want to know the man's full name. That way I can begin saying to myself you're leaving and divorcing me and breaking up our family for Mike So-and-So and not just a shadow. I'm not sure why, but it'll make it seem realer to me and so will be much easier to work out in my head." "Spiniker," she said. "Mike Spiniker." "With an *i*, *a* or *e* or even a *u* on the second half of his last name?" "Now you're going too far," she said. "Anyway, good—I have enough." I got up, got the

phone book off the phone stand in the living room. "What are you doing?" she said. "Can't be too many Mike Spinikers in the book, with an *a*, *e*, *u* or second *i*." I looked up his name. "One, a Michael, with two *i*'s, on Third Avenue." I dialed him. "Stop that" she said. "He lives in another city, commutes here." A woman answered. "Is Michael Spiniker in?" I said. "Who's speaking?" the woman said. "Lionel Messer. I'm his stocks and bonds man." "Mike has stocks and bonds? That's news to me." "He has a huge portfolio of them and I've something very urgent to tell him about them if he doesn't want to go broke by midnight tonight." "I'll get him, hold on." She put down the phone. "Stop wasting your time," Arlene said on the bedroom extension. "Hang up. It can't be Mike. I'm telling you, he lives fifty miles from here." "Hey, what's this about stocks and bonds?" Mike said. "Hello, Mr. Spiniker. Do you know Arlene Dorsey? Arlene Chernoff Dorsey—she goes professionally by Chernoff." "Sure I do. We work in the same office building. But anything wrong? Because I thought this was about some stocks and bonds I don't have." "You seem very concerned about Ms. Chernoff. Are you?" "Sure I'm concerned. By your tone, who wouldn't be? What's happened?" "You sound as if you're in love with Ms. Chernoff, Mr. Spiniker. Are you?" "Listen, who is this? And what kind of jerky call is this? You either dialed the wrong Spiniker or you're crazy and not making any sense, but I'll have to hang up." "This is her husband, wise guy, and you better stop seeing her or I'm going to break your neck with my bare hands. If that doesn't work, I'll put a bullet through your broken neck. I have the means. And I don't just mean a weapon or two or people to do it for me—I'll do it myself gladly. I can. I have. Now do you read me?" "I read you, brother. Okay, fine. You have the right number and you're not crazy and you're probably right on target in everything you said, so my deepest apologies for getting excited at you. But let's say there must be two Michael Spinikers in this city, because I have no stocks and bonds broker and after what you just told me, I don't ever plan to do anything with my money but keep it in the bank, okay?" "Got you," I

said and hung up. Arlene came running back to the living room. "You'd do that for me? You'd really go that far?" "I wasn't just threatening for effect or because I knew you were on the line. The way I see our marriage is that until it's clearly impossible to stay together, we're stuck together for life. Of course I only feel this way because of the kid." "I bet. You know, awful as this must seem about me, I think my feelings have come around another hundred and eighty degrees. What a husband I now realize I have. And what a weakling and pig that guy was for taking it the way he did, even if you weren't all bluff, after all he swore just the other day about how he'd stand with me against you and his wife when it finally came down to this. I'm sorry, Jules. So sorry, I want to beat my brains in against this chair. If my saying I love you very much isn't enough, what else can I say or do to prove what I just said is true and that I never want to stop being married to you?" "You can take my clothes off and carry me to bed." "Will do if I can." She put her arms around my waist and tried to lift me. "Oof, what a load. Instead of carrying you, which I no can do, what would you say to my just taking your clothes off and we do whatever you want us to right here on the floor or couch?" "Fine by me," I said and she grabbed my shirt by the two collar ends and tore it off me.

That's ridiculous also and never happened. Why not say what really did happen and be done with it? It was all very simple and fast. We were eating dinner when she said she was leaving me for a man named Mike. We had no child, we'd been married for eight years. I said I wouldn't try to stop her. I could see it'd be useless and I did only want her to be happy. If she couldn't be happy with me, I was glad she was with someone she could be happy with. She said she was thankful I was taking it so well and in such a decent, civilized way. I asked about him. She said he worked in a law office on the same floor as hers. They'd been carrying on for six months. He was divorced, had two children. That night Arlene and I slept in separate rooms for the first time in our marriage, or for the first time when one of us wasn't very angry at the other or wasn't so ill that he or she needed to sleep alone. We just thought it best

to sleep separately till she moved out. They rented a new apartment together the following month. I helped her pack and bring her belongings to the van she rented and drove. I told her I wouldn't mind if Mike came and helped, since she had several vanfuls of stuff to move. She said she felt I shouldn't meet him till much later on; when they were married, perhaps; maybe a year into their marriage when I could come by with my new woman who she said she knew I'd have by then. "You'll be as much in love with someone else in a few months as I am now with Mike." I said "I hope you're right. It'll certainly be what I want." So she was gone. I thought I was taking it well but I wasn't. I couldn't take it, in fact. Every night I'd get drunk thinking about her. I read her old adoring notes and letters to me and looked at her photos and would slam the wall or table with my fists and shout and cry. I couldn't stand thinking of her being with another man, kissing him, whispering to him, making love with him, doing all those private things with him, confiding to him, telling him what happened to her at the store that day, asking him if he'd like to see such and such movie or play that week, meeting him for lunch, going away with him some weekend, visiting friends, et cetera, maybe even planning to have a child. It also distressed me that they were in the same profession. I knew that'd make them even closer, all those professional matters they could discuss and look up and share. A month after she left me I showed up in front of their office building at around the time I knew they'd be finished for the day. They walked out of the building fifteen minutes later, holding hands, chatting animatedly. I had a wrench with me. I pulled it out of my jacket, ran up to him and screamed "Meet Jules, her husband, you bastard" and hit him in the hand he threw up to protect his head from the wrench. He grabbed that hand, turned to run and I hit him in the back of the head with the wrench. He went down. I kept yelling "I'll never let her be with anyone else, you bastard, never. I love her too much. I'll love her forever," and swung the wrench over his face but didn't hit him again. The police came. I didn't try to get away. I don't know what Arlene was doing at the time. I was arrested. Mike was taken away in an ambulance. Later he pressed charges

against me. I pleaded guilty and was sentenced to five years. That means I'll serve around three and a half years if I don't cause any trouble in prison. Arlene visits me every day she's allowed to and stays the maximum time. It's six hours by bus for her round trip but she says she doesn't mind. Twice in my first half year here we were allowed to walk around the prison garden for an hour. She broke off with Mike and he's already moved in with another woman. "So much for his professed eternal devotion," Arlene said, "not that I would want it now." She's said several times that she'll never again be with another man but me. She hated my hitting Mike with the wrench but sees now it was probably the only way I could ever get through to her how much I loved her and wanted to get her back. "In some oddball way," she said, "it made me fall for you all over again. Maybe also because what I did and the way I did it forced you to lose control and try to kill him and I'm trying to make up for that too. But it'll all be different from now on. I can't wait to be back home with you, my arms around you, in bed with you, I can't wait." At certain designated spots in the garden we're allowed to hug and kiss for a half-minute, which we always did past the time limit until one of the guards ordered us to stop.

That's not it. This is it. There wasn't a wrench. There is a Mike. My wife fell in love with him and told me this at breakfast, not dinner. She said she didn't want to tell me at night because she wanted to give me plenty of time to adjust to it before I went to bed and also time for her to get her things out of the apartment and move in with a friend. We have no child. We tried for a while but couldn't. Then I had a corrective operation and we could have a child, but she said the marriage wasn't as good as it used to be and she wanted to be sure it was a very good marriage before we had a child. That was three years ago. She's had several affairs since then. She told me about them while she was having them. I didn't like her having them but put up with it because I didn't want her to leave me. I don't know why I mentioned anything about a gift. Maybe because her birthday's in two weeks and I've been thinking recently about what to get her. A bracelet, I thought. Or earrings. But that's out. This morning she said she realizes

this is the third or fourth serious affair she's had in three years. She's had one or two others but they were quick and not so serious. She doesn't want to continue having affairs while she's married or at least still living with me. It isn't fair to me, she said. She also said I shouldn't put up with it and shouldn't have in the past. Not that if I had told her to stop she would have, she said. But I should tell her to get the hell out of the house and should have two to three years ago. Since I won't, she'll have to leave me. That means divorce, she said. The marriage isn't working out. What's she talking about? she said. The marriage is so bad that she doesn't think it'll ever work out — it never will, that's all, never. And because she wants to have children, maybe two, maybe three, but with someone she's very much in love with, she'll have to end our marriage and eventually get married to someone else. Maybe it'll be with Mike but she doubts it. He's married, though about to separate from his wife, and has indicated he never wants to marry again. He also has two children from a previous marriage and has expressed no interest in having more. Anyway, she said, it's fairer if I stay here and she goes, since she's the one breaking up the marriage. Of course, if I want to leave, she said, then she'll be more than happy to stay, since it's a great apartment and one she can afford and she'll never be able to get anything like it at twice the rent. "If you don't mind," I said, "I think I'd like to keep the apartment. Losing you and also having to find a new place might be a little too much for me." "I don't mind," she said, "why should I mind? I already said the apartment's yours if you want. So, do you mind if I start to pack up now to go?" "No, go right ahead. I'd love for you to stay forever, naturally, but what could I do to stop you from going? Nothing, I guess, right?" "Right." She went to the bedroom. I brought the dishes into the kitchen, washed them, sat down at the small table there and looked at the river. She came into the living room an hour later with two suitcases and a duffel bag. "This ought to do it for now," she said. "If it's okay with you, I'll arrange with a friend to come by for the rest of my stuff some other time." "Sure," I said. "You moving in with this Mike?" "No, I told you, he's married, still living with his wife. I'll be staying with Elena

for now. If you want to reach me for anything, you can get me there or at work. You have her number?" "I can look it up." "But you won't call me at either place for very personal reasons, will you? Such as saying how much you miss me or things like that and you want me back? Because I've definitely made up my mind, Jules. The marriage is finished." "I understand that. I mean, I don't understand why it's so definitely finished, but I do understand that you definitely feel it is. But I can't make just one more pitch? There's nothing I can do or say or promise to help you change your mind?" "Nothing." "Then goodbye," I said. "I'll miss you terribly. I love you tremendously. I'll be as sad as any man can be over a thing like this for I don't know how long. But that's my problem, not yours, I guess, and eventually I'll work it out." "I'm glad you're taking it like this. Not that you'll be sad—I don't want you to be like that—but at least that you see the situation for what it is and that in the long run you'll be able to handle it. Because it'll make it much easier—it already is—for both of us. You'll see. You'll get over me before you know it." "Not on your life," I said. "Yes you will." "I'm telling you. Never." "No, I know you will. Goodbye." She opened the door, put the suitcases right outside it, said "I'll be back for these in a minute," and carried the duffel bag downstairs. "I'll help you with the suitcases," I yelled down the stairs. "No need to," she said. "It'd actually be better if you closed the door so we won't have to say goodbye again." I shut the door.

Three Poems by Carlos Drummond de Andrade

Death of the Houses in Ouro Preto

Over rooftops, over time
the rain washes. And walls
that had watched men die
seen the gold slip away
known an empire's passing
(mutely comprehended)
crumble now; to die as well.

Set thus on the hillside
less rustic than proud
in their humble whites
blues, pinks, vermilions
how permanent they seemed
and were not! As the rain
thrums on lattice and sill,
the trellis slowly rots
like decomposing lace
from a funeral dress.
Doors fall off the hinges.
Only a monorhythmic rain
seeps down through history
and the night. Houses die,
die austerely, and with time
matter itself comes to tire
of such subservience to man.
Mortar begins to macerate.
In the sierra, how subtly
things return, to and from
themselves—yet, now are lost!
The ground begins to recover

the foundations laid so
 long ago, summoning all
 to relapse into earth again:
 that wood be re-embodied in trees
 now rafters! That dust return
 to simple dust along the highways!

The rain washing down, in gullies:
 how it lashes, how it beats
 upon the landscape of memories
 how it strikes, how it bruises
 how it pierces the marrow
 how it stings, how it wounds
 with its rain of arrows
 in the foothills of Minas
 Gerais! Oh my weather-beaten
 houses, my whiplashed walls
 my wainscot of matted straw
 my corbelled eaves, my mansions
 of tiled roofs, exposed rafters
 — now, dank and humbled.

Down they come, in the torrent,
 the old venerable houses
 (where we made love, gave birth
 and buried our treasures
 with a drink to ward off the chill)
 swept away in the wind, the rubble,
 the bats and the hoarfrost.

While still others decay
 with an acid pulverulence
 until we scarcely register
 their extinction. How they die!
 How they're left to merely expire!
 The peeling paint, the rotting timbers:
 how they vanish before our eyes.

Upon the city I focus
 this experienced eye

this keen, whetted gaze
of someone versed in the matter
(those I've lost have taught me)
and watch that viscous arrival
hover above the calm.

It's not enough to witness a man's
death, to comprehend mortality.
A thousand others spring forth
within, around us, on the earth.
Death, the damp falcon, glides
out of the wilderness. Its beak
pocks away at the massive walls
to pulverize a dying Ouro Preto,
Upon the bridge, upon the rocks
upon the folded Flemish linens
a blanket of mist
(no longer a downpour)
tells me by what mystery
love is bathed in death.

The Package

It's the small package
I've carried with me
these dozens of years
these hundreds of years.

A couple of letters?
It might be a flower,
a portrait, perhaps,
or even a handkerchief.

I don't know where
I found it
if it was stolen
or came as a gift.

Did angels descend
bearing it in hand?
Was it bobbing in the river?
Did it soar through the air?

Whatever it contains
or whether it contains
anything, I can't tell.
I don't dare unwrap it.

The idea alone is more
than I can contemplate
the package is so cold
and yet—it's so hot.

It burns in the hand
it's soft to the touch
it often thrills me
then leaves me sad.

To keep a secret
to and from oneself:
not wanting to know
or wanting too much.

To keep a secret
out of sight
behind memory
beyond sleep.

(The practiced mouth
hails friends: hello!
The heart swells up
hand shaking hand.)

Calls rise from the sea
from all things, alarm!
The world summons you
Carlos! No answer?

I want to answer!
The infinite road
winds past the sea
I want to take it.

The package is heavy
the temptation, strong,
to toss it down
the nearest hole.

Or why not burn it?
The ashes scattered
all trace will vanish
along with remorse.

Ah, subtle weight
that, rather than be
carried, carries me
—yes, but where?

Won't you share
intolerable burden
the cruel word
hidden in your heart?

To follow you meekly
on so long a journey

with no explanation
except that I follow.

If you'd just open up
to reveal yourself
even as a mistake,
what a consolation!

But you stay closed . . .
though I take you along
to the evening's dance
and each morning we ride

to the dim factory
of a mournful suburb.
In a way, we're friends
openly, and in secret.

To lose you, to me,
would be to lose myself.
I'm someone who's free
but I carry something.

Something indescribable:
I didn't choose it
I haven't seen it
yet I carry something.

Whatever it may be
I'm never empty
I'm not alone
Something's with me.

Morning Street

The splashing rain
unearthed my father.
I never imagined
him buried thus,
to the din of trolleys
on an asphalt street
giant palm trees slanting on the beach
(and a voice from sleep
to stroke my hair),
as melodies wash up
with lost money
discarded confessions
old papers, glasses, pearls.

To see him exposed
to the damp, acrid air
that drifts in with the tide
and cuts your breath,
to wish to love him
without deceit
to cover him with kisses, with flowers, with swallows,
to alter time
to offer the warmth
of a quiet embrace
from this elderly recluse,
discarded confessions
and a lamb-like truce.

To feel the lack
of inborn strengths
to want to carry him
to the older sofa
of a bygone ranch,
but splashes of rain
but sheets of mud beneath reddish street lamps
but all that exists
of morning and wind

between one nature and another,
yawning sheds by the docks
discarded confessions
ingratitude.
What should a man do
at dawn
(a taste of defeat
in his mouth, in the air)
or at any moment
in whatever place?
Everything spoken, drunk, or even pretended
and the rest still buried
in the folds of sleep,
cigarette stubs
the wet glare of streets
discarded confessions
morning defeat.

Vague mountains
greening waves
newspapers already white,
hesitant melody
trying to spawn
conditions for hope
on this gray day, of a broken lament.
Nothing left to remind me
of the seamless asphalt.
Abandoned cellars
my body shivers
discarded confessions:
abruptly, the walk home.

*translated from the Portuguese
by Thomas Colchie*

~~footnote. What's fair about that? At the ranch they passed each other in the one hallway which is about twenty feet long. It's not like Louis XIV failing to make eye contact with Marie Antoinette in the Tuilleries. It's a twenty foot hallway.~~

~~Also, she may have had a cold heart. Lucien~~ ^{tried to think} ~~made no~~
^{directly} ^{over Emily} ~~reference here to her~~ shooting her husband, a brutal Type A ?
 personality who took it out on all and sundry. ~~But she Emily~~
 would look the facts in the eye. Lucien felt he had never
 been able to do that. He could see her weighing the old
 husband in the scales of justice the way a park superintendent
 reviews the record of a garbage raiding bear who is scaring
 the campers: we've got one here who's got to go.

~~The doctor had an Ivy League education, million dollar hands and a bullet in his head. And Lucien went around thinking how unfair it all was to the continuous chiming of W. T. Austinberry's Cowboy Hall of Fame spurs: Where was the sense?~~

Lucien got up early and made breakfast. It was a wood stove with a water jacket and kind of amusing to run. It had a lot of hot spots on top; so cooking eggs required moving the skillet around until you found a reasonable temperature that didn't burn them up. ~~While he had been on the ranch, Emily had begun skipping the nightgown stage of the morning and appearing fully dressed by the time he could get downstairs. There was no question but that this was~~

A McGuane manuscript page from his novel *Something to Be Desired*.



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The Art of Fiction LXXXIX

Thomas McGuane

Thomas McGuane's fiction projects a volatile, highly personalized mixture of power, vulnerability, and humor. His first three novels—The Sporting Club (1969), The Bushwhacked Piano (1971), and Ninety-Two in the Shade (1973)—while never achieving mass-market appeal, earned McGuane considerable critical attention: Bushwhacked won the Rosenthal Award, Ninety-Two was nominated for the National Book Award, and all three works were widely and favorably reviewed. In addition to his novels, McGuane was also writing screenplays: The Missouri Breaks, Rancho Deluxe, Ninety-Two in the Shade,

Tom Horn. During the mid-seventies, McGuane's tempestuous personal life—drinking, some drugs, two divorces—won him the nickname of "Captain Berserko." From this tempest, McGuane produced his fourth novel, *Panama* (1978), his most surreal and nakedly autobiographical work to date. *Panama's* Chester Pomeroy is an exhausted, artistically depleted, emotionally wrecked rock musician who resolves to come clean with himself and the world, to work, for the first time, "without a net." The critical response to *Panama* was overwhelmingly negative, not merely lacerating the novel, but also attacking the promising young novelist for having "gone Hollywood." Although McGuane continued to believe *Panama* his best work, he was troubled by the vehemence of the criticism and his next novel did not appear for five years. Both *Nobody's Angel* (1983) and his latest novel, *Something to Be Desired* (1985), reveal changes in McGuane's craft; less ram-bunctious in their humor, with more subtle textures of characterization and a tighter control of language, these last two works indicate an attempt at a quieter, more evocative kind of verbal power.

Since the mid-seventies, McGuane and his wife, Laurie, have lived just outside Livingston, Montana, where their ranch has been a focal point for a burgeoning artistic community—people like William Hjortberg, Peter Fonda, and the late Richard Brautigan have made this western town into an enclave of diverse talents. The McGuanes' is a working ranch, and they are justifiably proud of their spread, where they raise and train cutting horses, some to be sold for ranch work, the best to be used in rodeo competition. Tall, muscular, rugged, McGuane has been the Montana cutting horse champion three years in a row, and, at forty-six, exudes a powerful physical presence. He is the kind of man who knows how to do things, who studies how things work, who can talk with equal assurance and knowledge about guns, horses, books, boats, and hot peppers from Sonora. As he took us on a tour of his ranch and we talked about water problems, fishing, and his fiction, we got a sense of McGuane's approach to things: when you find something you want to do, whether it's learning to

tie casting flies or writing a novel, you work at it systematically. That you'd want to do it well, that you'd be willing to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to that end, goes without saying. As we sat together over coffee with the busy, cheerful household buzzing around us, McGuane seemed a man at peace, emerged hale and whole from a difficult time of personal and professional upheaval. It was to this period of turmoil that we addressed our first question.

INTERVIEWER

Has the personal storm really passed?

THOMAS MCGUANE

The storm has passed in the sense that my steering linkage has been restored. A storm system is still in effect, though, and in fact if it weren't I'd want to change my life because you can get to a point where the risk factor has been overregulated. That's an alarming condition for me, a ghastly thing.

INTERVIEWER

Without going into all the particulars, could you talk a bit about what you feel, in retrospect, was going on in the mid-seventies—the period of stumbling down the yellow line, when you were known as “Captain Berserko”?

MCGUANE

During the early part of that time I had been successful in creating for myself a sheltered situation in which to function in this very narrow way I felt I wanted to function, which was to be a literary person who was not bothered very much by the outside world. My twenties were entirely taken up with literature. Entirely. My nickname during that period was “The White Knight,” which suggests a certain level of overkill in my judgment of those around me.

INTERVIEWER

What sorts of things had led you to develop this White Knight image?

McGUANE

Fear of failure. I was afflicted with whatever it takes to get people fanatically devoted to what they're doing. I was a pain in the ass. But I desperately wanted to be a good writer. My friends seem to think that an hour and a half effort a day is all they need to bring to the altar to make things work for them. I couldn't do that. I thought that if you didn't work at least as hard as the guy who runs a gas station then you had no right to hope for achievement. You certainly had to work all day, every day. I thought that was the deal. I *still* think that's the deal.

INTERVIEWER

I've heard that you had a brush with death in a car accident that shook you up pretty badly. The usual, maybe simpleminded, explanation is that you suddenly realized that you could have died there without ever having given yourself a chance to live.

McGUANE

That explanation is not so simpleminded. I still don't know exactly what it meant to me at the time. I do know that I lost the power of speech for a while. And I had something like that realization going through my mind. It was outside Dalhart, Texas. I was driving fast, one hundred and forty miles an hour, and there was this freezing rain on the road that you couldn't see, so when I pulled out to pass, suddenly life was either over or it wasn't. I thought it was over. The guy I was driving with said, "This is it," and all of a sudden it did appear that it was the end: there were collisions and fence posts flying and pieces of car body going by my ears. It would have been as arbitrary an end as what's happening to a friend of ours who's now dying in a hospital of cancer, or our friend who has an awful neurological disease, or a kid who chases the baseball out in the street. You believe all this stuff, but then suddenly you're standing in the middle of it with the chance to choose and it seems like a miracle or a warning that you've been spared this time but you'd better get your life together. I remember thinking along

these lines, but my thoughts were so overpowering that I couldn't speak for a week, even to ask for something to eat.

INTERVIEWER

Pomeroy says at the beginning of *Panama* that he's going to be "working without a net." It's tempting to read that novel as *your* attempt to work through some of your own turmoils from that period. If you were up there, taking the risk to expose yourself, the highly negative, even personally vicious, reviews of *Panama* must have hurt a lot.

McGUANE

The whole *Panama* episode really jarred me in terms of my writing because that was one time I had consciously decided to reveal certain things about myself. I was stunned by the bad reception of *Panama*; it was a painful and punishing experience. The lesson that I got from the reviewers was, Don't ever try to do that again. And it was odd to watch reviewers incorrectly summarize the story, then attack their own summaries. It was like watching blind men being attacked by their seeing-eye dogs. But then, I look back at when John Cheever published *Bullet Park*, which was the advent of the good Cheever as far as I'm concerned, and the critics and public crucified him over that book. Afterwards he went into an alcoholic spiral. People don't understand how much influence they can actually have on a writer, how much a writer's feelings can be hurt, how much they can deflect his course when they raise their voices like they did over highly personal books like *Panama* or *Bullet Park*.

INTERVIEWER

If it's any consolation, I feel *Panama* is your best book.

McGUANE

I think it may be my best too. In the middle of all this outcry, I'd get the book out and read stuff to myself and say, "I can't *do* any better than this!" I really do love *Panama*. But I'd also have to admit that right now, if I were driven to write another

novel like that I wouldn't even try to find a publisher for it. It simply wouldn't be published. I'd be writing it to put in my closet upstairs.

INTERVIEWER

So what effect did the *Panama* experience have on your work?

McGUANE

Its first effect was to confirm my desire to write a book that was, in a traditional way, more shapely than anything I had done before. Actually, I'd been wanting to do that for a long time. That at least partially explains the architecture of *Nobody's Angel*. The novel I'm working on now picks up from *Panama* more than from any other point. Importantly it's not a book in the first person, which made *Panama* completely different from anything else I've ever done, so it doesn't sound and look like *Panama*. But *Panama* is still the last piece of growing tissue that I've been grafting from.

INTERVIEWER

In terms of its flights of poetic language, its surrealism, and other formal features, *Panama* is probably your most extreme novel to date. And yet these features seem entirely appropriate in capturing the sensibility of its crazed narrator, Pomeroy. Was creating this voice and perspective especially difficult for you or did your identification with him make things easier, in a way?

McGUANE

It was very difficult. I invented a word once a long time ago and I was always going to write a book that could be described with this word. The word was "joco-splenetic." *Panama* was to be my first joco-splenetic novel. What was especially difficult about that book was that I knew that in certain parts I wanted Pomeroy to be absolutely lugubrious. I saw him as somebody who would live quite happily in a Gogol novel, a laughter-through-tears guy. I knew that his emotions are frequently "unearned," that the kind of hang-over quality in which he lives produces fits of uncontrolled weeping. I'm not saying that the

book isn't sentimental in that technical sense, but I also felt that this tissue of distance that I created between myself and Chester was adequate for people to understand this and to see the book for what it is. For people who don't like the book, when poor Pomeroy goes off into one of his spirals, they think, "What right does he have to this?" The point is that he *has* no right—that's what's interesting about him.

INTERVIEWER

This sounds like the same sense of moral indignation that seemed to be directed at you during the mid-seventies—the sense that here's this talented person who has everything going for him and yet here he is taking all these drugs and doing all these bizarre, self-destructive things.

McGUANE

There are those who question the right of a wealthy person to commit suicide. A person who doesn't have enough to eat has the right to commit suicide but not a person whose income is over fifty thousand dollars a year. It's as if wealthy or talented people have no right to be miserable. So in this age of cocaine we just expand this principle and say, "My God, look at all that Chester's got" (half of which is made up: his automobile, his house, they don't even exist). The idea that he's so miserable that he can't name his dog and can't get his true love back, that doesn't count in this strangely economic-based view that only certain people are entitled to their unhappiness.

INTERVIEWER

I gather that in some ways you transformed some of your real-life feelings for your wife Laurie into the figure of Catherine.

McGUANE

Yes, in many ways Catherine became Laurie. I saw Pomeroy going downhill in various ways and, being madly in love with Laurie at the time, the most miserable thing I could imagine for him (or me) was to lose this person he loved so much. That's one of the reasons I think there's a specific emotional power

in that ending, because I was going through Pomeroy's loss, imaginatively, as I wrote it. I felt that the coda to all the pain in that book had to be that loss, but it was so absolutely agonizing that, unlaminated to something better, it was nihilistic. And I'm not a nihilist and didn't want this book to be nihilistic.

INTERVIEWER

Is that why you have that last scene with the father, where Chester finally seems to acknowledge him and you write, "There was more to be said and time to say it"?

MCGUANE

Partly, although this business about what he's going to do about his father is present throughout the book. At that point in the end, when he's hit absolute rock bottom, the question becomes, does he bounce or does he flatten out and lie there. In my opinion he bounced. Slightly.

INTERVIEWER

All five of your books seem to have distinctive stylistic features. *Nobody's Angel* seems to be almost understated in comparison with your earlier books. Could you talk about the specific evolutions your prose has undergone?

MCGUANE

I started my career distinctly and single-mindedly with the idea that I wanted to be a comic novelist. I had studied comic literature from *Lazarillo de Tormes* to the present. The twentieth century history of comic writing had prepared me to write in the arch, fascist style that I used in *The Sporting Club*. Then the picaresque approach was something I tried to express in *The Bushwhacked Piano*, although I've now come to feel that the picaresque form is no longer that appropriate for writing; writers are looking for structures other than that episodic, not particularly accumulative form; at least I am. *Ninety-Two in the Shade* was the first of the books in which I felt I brought my personal sense of epochal crisis to my interest in literature.

It's there that you find this crackpot cross between traditional male literature and "The Sid Caesar Show" and the preoccupation with process and mechanics and "doingness" that has been a part of American literature from the beginning—it's part of *Moby Dick*. The best version of it, for my money, is *Life on the Mississippi*, which is probably the book I most wish I'd written in American literature. When I got to *Ninety-Two* I was tired of being amusing; I like my first two books a lot, but I tried to put something like a personal philosophy in *Ninety-Two in the Shade*. That book also marked the downward progress of my instincts as a comic novelist. Starting with *Ninety-Two* I felt that to go on writing with as much flash as I had tried to do previously was to betray some of the serious things I had been trying to say. That conflict became one that I tried to work out in different ways subsequently. The most drastic attempt was in *Panama*, which I wrote in the first person in this sort of blazing confessional style. In terms of feeling my shoulder to the wheel and my mouth to the reader's ear, I have never been so satisfied as I was when I was writing that book. I didn't feel that schizophrenia that most writers have when they're at work. That schizophrenia was *in* the book instead of between me and the book.

INTERVIEWER

You don't seem to have lost your comic instincts, but I sensed in *Panama* a change in the *kind* of humor you were creating: a move away from satire, which characterized your earlier books, towards something deeper, more painful. There's a line in *Panama* that seems relevant here, where Chester describes "the sense of humor that is the mirror of pain, the perfect mirror, not the mirror of satirists."

McGUANE

I now agree with that Broadway producer who said that satire is what closes on Saturday night.

INTERVIEWER

Patrick in *Nobody's Angel* and Pomeroy both lose the woman

in the end, but that loss somehow seemed more inevitable in *Panama* than in *Nobody's Angel*, where you appeared to give Patrick the chance to learn and change. I was a bit surprised you didn't devise a happy ending for Patrick.

McGUANE

There's a difference in those two losses. In Pomeroy's case, it is a little bit as though there has simply been too much water under the bridge for him to ever get Catherine back. There is a momentum that has become so black that current conduct can't turn things around. With Patrick the ending has more to do with this notion of the outsider or stranger, which has fascinated me for a long time and is reflected in the book. Patrick's situation is the modern situation: the adhesion of people to place has been lost. This can be just ruinous. The result can truly be, as in *Wuthering Heights*, the ill wind that blows across the heath, a thing you can't beat—you either get out and do something else or the conditions will destroy you. I didn't think Patrick could win his war because his basics are fouled up, so he had to accept himself as an *isolato*. This isn't a very happy ending, certainly not one I would wish upon a dog, but it was the one I felt had inevitability.

INTERVIEWER

Does this fascination with the figure of the outsider and the adhesion of family identity to place derive from your own family background, which like Patrick's, is Irish?

McGUANE

The outsider-stranger-bystander has always intrigued me in regard to my own family history. My family were all Irish immigrants originally and so I became interested in Irish history and traveled a lot in Ireland, which brought things even closer to home. People in Ireland feel like outsiders in their own country because the English have owned things for so long that the Irish consider themselves as living in a massive servants' quarters for the British Isles. When they immigrated to the East Coast (my family went to Massachusetts), they saw them-

selves as an enclave of outsiders in a Yankee, Protestant world. My parents moved to the Midwest, and I can assure you that, whatever we thought we were, we did not consider ourselves to be Midwesterners. We saw ourselves as Catholics surrounded by Protestant Midwesterners, and when we wanted to feel close to something, we went back to our old world in Massachusetts. When I moved to Montana in my twenties, I felt myself to be an outsider in still another world. The only thing that seems reassuring is that most Montanans feel the same way—they're mostly from somewhere else and their history is so recent that to be one of the migrants is really to be one of the boys. You can see this same feeling developing in F. Scott Fitzgerald. I'm sure that no one in his family felt like they were "from" Minnesota, which is one reason he was drawn to the East Coast and why so much of the magic of his fiction is his famous method of "looking through the window." And yet that mental quality, the glassy distance, is behind his craziness and his alcoholism. The vantage point of most authentic modern fiction is dislocation.

INTERVIEWER

Your first three novels are all extraordinarily ambitious works in that each of them links the heroes and action with a vision of America at large. But in both *Panama* and *Nobody's Angel*, the move seems to be more inward, more personal. Was this a conscious shift?

McGUANE

The Sporting Club was really the last genuinely political book I've ever done, at least political in an overt way. It was meant to be a kind of anarchist tract. I was reading a lot of political writers at the time, especially Kropotkin, and I was very self-conscious about using the situation of the novel as a political paradigm.

INTERVIEWER

Isn't *Ninety-Two in the Shade* overtly political? You seem to be using Skelton there to suggest a deeper crisis in America

that is signaled in the very opening line of the book: "Nobody knows, from sea to shining sea . . ."

McGUANE

" . . . why we are having all this trouble with our republic." Yes, I was using Skelton very deliberately in the way you're suggesting, but I was more interested in the inner, personal dynamics than in the larger, political implications. There's another line from the book that seems very appropriate to the political issue you're raising: "It was the age of uneasy alliances." But we're not in that age any more, which is one reason my fiction has shifted its focus. We're currently in the age of *no* alliances. We're in the age of, shake hands with the Lebanese and give their neighbors a bomber so they can blow their asses off the planet. We're in the age of the most sordid possible political cynicism. We're in the age of foreign aid to death squads.

INTERVIEWER

I would assume that these sorts of attitudes make moving inward, away from the larger political arena, more attractive.

McGUANE

Right, and that's one of the reasons that *Ninety-Two in the Shade* is such a strangely public book compared to my last two. It was a kind of New Age book that reflected my sense that I was caught up in some huge cultural change that was taking place in this country. It was a book about private survival. You have your skills and your mate and your place, and you're aloof from an obviously suicidal society. The chief metaphor for the book should have been bomb shelters, with people storing water and tinned food. My father and I had very much of an adversarial relationship which is unresolved to this very day. I remember going to see a bomb shelter with him back in the fifties; one of our neighbors had built one of them. It was a very elegant bomb shelter and we walked around and looked at it; my father was a very direct guy, so when we came up he was filled with thoughts about this thing—the main thought being, Should I build one for my family?—and he pondered

this, and I was very interested in what he was going to say. Finally he said, "I think we'll just stay up on the ground and take our lumps." Boy oh boy, did *that* ever become a model for future reflections on my part! It was a key point in our dialogue.

INTERVIEWER

Skelton obviously doesn't follow your father's advice—he wants to find a shelter, a personal survival module.

McGUANE

Right, which made *Ninety-Two in the Shade* a rebellious book for me to write because I'd built this novel about a guy who obviously wasn't thinking in terms of staying above ground and taking his lumps. He's at the fork in the road and he chooses to construct a place where he can be safe. Right now, though, the progress of my fiction is towards my father's point of view, to *not* build a shelter, to just stay up here and fight it out.

INTERVIEWER

The father-son relationship is constantly a major issue in your fiction. Is some of the tension of these fictional relationships autobiographically based?

McGUANE

This is plainly so. If you'd been around me while I was growing up you'd have clearly seen that my relationship with my father was going to be a major issue in my life. My father was a kid who grew up rather poor (his father had worked for the railroad) and who had a gift for English; he wound up being a scholar-athlete who went to Harvard, where he learned some of the skills that would enable him to go on and become a prosperous businessman, but where he also learned to hate wealth. My father hated people with money and yet he became one of those people. And he was not only an alcoholic but a workaholic, a man who never missed a day of work in his life. He was a passionate man who wanted a close relationship with his family, but he was a child of the Depression and was se-

verely scarred by that, to the point where he really drove himself and didn't have much time for us. So while he prepared us to believe that parents and children were very important, he just never delivered. And we were all shattered by that: my sister died of a drug overdose in her middle twenties; my brother has been a custodial case since he was thirty; as soon as my mother was given the full reins of her own life, after my dad died, she drank herself to death in thirty-six months. I'm really the only one still walking around, and I came pretty close to being not still walking around. It all goes back to that situation where people are very traditional in their attitudes about the family, a family which was very close (we had this wonderful warm place in Massachusetts where my grandfather umpired baseball games and played checkers at the fire station), but then they move off to the bloody Midwest where they all go crazy. I've tried to work some of this out in my writing, and my younger sister tried to work it out in mental institutions. She was the smartest one of us all, an absolute beauty. She died in her twenties.

INTERVIEWER

There's an interesting structural relationship between *Nobody's Angel* and *Ninety-Two in the Shade* that seems relevant here. In *Angel*, Patrick's father is dead, preserved within that Montana ice floe. In *Ninety-Two*, Skelton lives in a fuselage, and the father figure is preserved, offstage, as part of his internal life. Was this a consciously designed motif?

McGUANE

Let me answer that one as candidly as I can. When I started *Nobody's Angel* I was so tired of the pain of the father-and-son issue that I didn't want it to infuse yet another book. But for it not to be present at all would have falsified it. So I did what religion does: I simply canonized one of the characters and got him the hell out of the book.

INTERVIEWER

Your characters at times seem to be trying to build a better

model of society within their families than they find out in the society at large.

McGUANE

The way I see it now is that you either make a little nation and solve its historical and personnel problems within the format of your own household — accepting all the mistakes that you’ve made, all the ones your parents have made, all that your children make, and all the mistakes your country has made — and you win that one, or you lose the only war worth fighting. That’s what I’m trying to do; I’m trying to study this problem in my writing, intensifying it for the purposes of art, and in my own life. Moreover, as soon as you step out of this personally constructed world and, say, drive into town or stand out on I-90 and watch our nation cycle through these placeless arteries, it’s there that you confront the true horror of the other option. The America you see in public is the monster who crawls up to the door in the middle of the night and must be driven back to the end of the driveway. That’s the thing that scares me to death. We’ve all seen these nameless, faceless people out there, and when we track one of them back to wherever they came from we sometimes find that this is the one person who can pull a breachbirth calf without ever killing the mother cow, or the guy who goes over the hill and does beautiful fencing even though nobody is watching, the valued neighbor who will get up in the middle of the night to help you get your water turned back on. But for some reason in this country, at a certain point this man turns into this absolute human flotsam whom we make fun of when we see him standing in front of Old Faithful. This syndrome is scary to me because I’m not sure which team is going to win. Are we really just going to rinse, like the third cycle in a washing machine, from the Atlantic to the Pacific? If so, why don’t we get into *The Whole Earth Catalogue* mentality, really save some energy, and just shoot ourselves? I had that sense of family security with my grandparents, and then I saw the results in my own family of deciding that all that was worthless. My dad had no use for it, felt that people who valued it were just dragging their heels.

INTERVIEWER

You've talked a lot about your father and his family. What about your mother's side of the family?

McGUANE

Actually, I derive myself matrilineally, and all the photographs you see around here are of my mother's family. There are two kinds of Irish people — one is the kind that doesn't say anything and the other is the kind that talks all the time. Well, my mother's family were talkers and my father's were the silent types. My father's father was a fine old railroad Irishman, and my father couldn't wait to get away from him. So we saw very little of my father's father. In fact — this is something I've slowly been reconstructing — my grandmother died fairly young and then my grandfather remarried a woman from Prince Edward's Island; she just loved the old man, and when he died she more or less didn't invite my family to the funeral. My feeling is that she went back up to Prince Edward's Island and turned down my father's offer to buy her a house or something. Firmly. She felt that the way my father did things and the way he had treated his own father was pretty shabby. So he died, she buried him, and she split.

INTERVIEWER

Did you derive some of your own instincts for storytelling from your mother's fast-talking Irish relatives?

McGUANE

Very much so. My maternal grandmother's house was always full of people who valued wisecracks and uncanny stories. And we had a real history there. I'm more homesick for that than for anything that ever happened to us in Michigan. My mother was so attached to her family that the moment we got out of school she'd pack us off back to Massachusetts until school started in the fall, and my father resented that tremendously.

INTERVIEWER

Was it your father who got you interested in hunting and fishing?

McGUANE

He set those out as great ideals, but generally when it came time to go out and do them, he never showed up. We went out enough so that I wished we'd do it more, but then there'd be some other grown-up who *really* wanted to go, and my father wouldn't like that because he felt he should be doing that but didn't have time. So he'd say, "Well, if he had his nose to the grindstone, like he should have, he wouldn't have time to take off and go fishing on Lake Erie with you." But one way or another, I was tremendously involved in hunting and fishing all the time. I had a .22 and I was gone every chance I could get, out in the woods or on the lake or, if the lake froze over, I'd be out on the ice miles from shore. That *was* my childhood.

INTERVIEWER

What is there about developing sporting skills that seems so satisfying to you?

McGUANE

I'm not sure I fully know. When I'm involved in these things myself, I feel like I'm being asked a lot of questions. Tools of elegance and order, developed and proven in the sporting life, are everywhere useful. Right now, for the first time in my life, I feel like there's something wrong about doing sports just for recreation — if it's just that, I don't want to do them. Their purpose is more than getting away from the pressures of work. Also, part of my interest in developing specific skills is surely to counter the sense of fragmentation and regret that crops up. With horses, I feel I've discovered some ancient connection, as though in some earlier life horses were something that mattered to me. The close study of all animals teaches us that we're not the solitary owners of this planet. As my horses procreate, and as they search for food and companionship and try to grow up and face one another's death, we see these things and it's very moving. You can't be around it to the degree that Laurie and I are and just say, "We'll synthesize our food and we'll get rid of these other species because they take up a lot of land." I don't know what that has to do with how we own the earth and own the universe, but in a way I feel religious about it. It's not an acci-

dent that there are these sentient creatures other than human beings out there. And we're not supposed to populate the universe without them. We're seriously and dangerously deprived every time we lose one of these animals.

INTERVIEWER

Nicholas Payne in *The Bushwhacked Piano* says, "I've made silliness a way of life." Was "pranksterism" part of your own life as a kid?

MCGUANE

Yes, it was, but there's more to it than that. We have chances for turning the kaleidoscope in a very arbitrary way. I wanted to be a military pilot at one time and came that close to joining the Naval Air Corps until I got into Yale, which I didn't expect to happen. One of the practical things they teach combat fliers is that you can only reason through so much, and therefore in a combat situation if at a certain point you feel you can't reason through a situation, then the thing you must do is *anything*, so long as you do something. Even in the Navy, with its expensive equipment and its highly predicated forms of action, you are told to just splash something off and do it! Doing something arbitrary or unexpected is probably the only way you're going to survive in a combat situation. Game theoreticians have made this an important factor. The first strike is really very close to pranksterism. Pranks, the inexplicability of comedy, and lateral moves at the line of scrimmage can sometimes be the only way you can move forward. In silliness and pranks, there is something very great. It's in that scene I created in *Panama*—the decision to jump off the diving board not knowing if there's water in the pool. Sometimes that's not a dopey thing to do but a very smart thing. It's the first strike.

INTERVIEWER

In your more recent books, your central characters are more likely to avoid confrontation.

MCGUANE

I hope it's a maturity on the author's part. The growing aware-

ness of consequences is something *Nobody's Angel* reflects and it also reflects what is appropriate to Patrick's stage in life. There were things that Billy the Kid was able to do by the age of twenty-one that would not have been appropriate to Pat Garrett at the age of forty-one. And as we will our way through the world, we begin by laying about ourselves with a heavy sword. It's one thing to jump off a diving board into a possibly empty pool at a certain stage in your life, but that same person with three children is not doing something good. A man with three young children who dives into a pool not knowing if there's water in it is someone to be despised. Patrick has moved into another part of his life, and he's dealt with some inadequacies in his life—maybe he shouldn't have been diving into pools when his sister was falling apart, for example, and maybe he's reviewing that. I wanted to suggest that there's remorse in him.

INTERVIEWER

You said just a minute ago that you wanted to be a Navy pilot. Hadn't you decided that you wanted to be a writer by the time you were in college?

McGUANE

I knew from very early on that I wanted to be a writer, but I also knew that that was not a very practical idea. So I was constantly trying to think of a profession I could pursue and still write. As a kid I had always associated being a writer with leading an adventurous life. I used to read William Beebe, Ernest Thompson Seton, W. H. Hudson, writers like that. That's really a key thing for me: I associated a life of action and a life of thought as being the writer's life. But I didn't do much writing when I was a kid. I wanted to *be* a writer before I wanted to do any writing. Then when I went away to boarding school there was a good friend of mine who was very strange and marvelous, and who became a kind of literary guide for me—Edmund White, a fine writer actually beyond category. Interestingly enough, back in school we all knew he was gay, and remember, this was the benighted fifties. A lot of his friends were athletes and I was this macho punk, but we were all friends and nobody cared. Ed was not only a good writer at that time but

he was also a scholar. He had read Proust by the age of twelve, and he used to give me reading lists. A lot of my early readings were things he had me read, mainly the decadent works: Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Huysmans, Lautréamont, Wilde, Proust. When I got to college, I kept reading but I was also trying to figure out what I could do. I tried everything: I was a premed student at one time, and a prelaw student, though I was mostly an English major. But I didn't really know *what* I was going to do to survive.

INTERVIEWER

As a graduate student, you studied playwriting at Yale Drama School. How did this contribute to your ear for dialogue?

MCGUANE

That's when off Broadway was very wild, interesting, exciting. There were all those good young playwrights and the theater-of-the-absurd was a true force. Reading those European and American playwrights and seeing their stuff, to the extent that it was possible, had a lot of effect on the way I eventually wrote fiction. Dialogue is very important to me because I've always loved it in novels. Lots of people read novels racing from dialogue to dialogue. In fact, I would like to really compress the prose in a novel, without getting too arch about it. Some people, like Manuel Puig, have written novels almost entirely in dialogue, but it gets to be a little too much sometimes since readers need to know where they are a bit. At any rate, writing dialogue is probably the best thing I do, and I'm always trying to work up an aesthetic for my fiction that will acknowledge that fact. Of course, Hemingway was really a great dialogue writer, it's one of the reasons we read him. Dialogue is a very useful tool to reveal things about people, and novels are about people and about what they do to each other. That's what novels are for. They're not pure text for deconstructionists. One day, that will be clear again.

INTERVIEWER

Could you talk a bit about the background of your first two books?

McGUANE

I went from Yale to Europe to live in Spain, and while I was over there I worked on an early version of *The Bushwhacked Piano*, which was really my apprentice work. I was always working on novels at Yale and there were parts of that book that I had worked on for years. I sent it off to Stanford, on the basis of which I won a Stegner fellowship. *The Sporting Club* was really my fourth or fifth novel. By the time it came out I had actually been writing for ten years, with most of my material going right into the waste basket, where it belonged.

INTERVIEWER

In addition to the playwrights, who were the writers you were reading during that period who had some influence on the direction your work was taking?

McGUANE

I remember that Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* just floored me. Incidentally, I consider that to be quite a funny book; a lot of it isn't funny, of course, but its perverted energy is obviously akin to comedy. Fielding, Sterne, Joyce, Gogol and Twain were heroes. So were Machado de Assis, Thomas Love Peacock, George Borrow. There has never been a period when I was not reading Shakespeare. I loved Paul Bowles when I was just starting to write, and I loved Walter van Tilburg Clark. Stephen Crane seemed to me a fabulous writer, especially the stories. Knut Hamsun, Evelyn Waugh, Anthony Powell, Muriel Spark, Henry Green, William Eastlake, Walker Percy. You know, Barry Hannah and I were talking, and we agreed that *The Moviegoer* is one of those books that, for a lot of writers, was looked at like *The Sun Also Rises* was by writers back in the twenties.

INTERVIEWER

In what sense?

McGUANE

Percy's insouciance. He seemed to retain passion, gentlemanliness, and this cheerfully remote quality about the things going on. It was exciting, like brand-new life. I still think just as much

of that book today as when I first read it. It seems like one of the real ground-breaking books of the last thirty years. *Huck Finn* continues to be a book whose range of sadness and funniness, whose pure narrative momentum, is hard to get around. Unfortunately, it's become canonized and emasculated. Hemingway's stories. I don't know anyone who can honestly read *In Our Time* and say that there's not something wonderful in it or not be tremendously moved by that incantatory style. *A Farewell to Arms* is a tremendous novel. And I remember that *Henderson the Rain King* was another book that floored me when I first read it. The same for the Snopes trilogy.

INTERVIEWER

Writers like Pynchon and Barth are conspicuously absent from your list . . .

MCGUANE

Actually I like their work, but if you compare them to Bellow or Mailer you start discovering their deficiencies. Barth and Pynchon are clearly *brilliant* writers, but that quality of what the Spanish would call "caste" — I'm not sure it's in those two guys. I guess I'm basically simpleminded as a reader. For example, I have no interest whatsoever in Borges. He just doesn't do anything for me, even though I would concur with the most positive statements that people make about his writing. He's just not for me. Neither is Cortázar.

INTERVIEWER

What about Márquez?

MCGUANE

Márquez is unbelievably good. I just read *The Autumn of the Patriarch* and, God, it's fabulous stuff—I almost prefer it to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Márquez is breathtaking because you feel that down to the little harsh details, he's right on. Márquez and Günter Grass both present this tremendous congestion of life as well as more abstract issues. Márquez and Grass are two of the few writers who can engage their whole

monstrous personalities in the projected world of their novels. Faulkner could do it. Melville did it. Mark Twain did it. They make the New England Renaissance look like an aviary. I am fascinated by this ability, and in fact I hope to get some of it into my own work. My biggest problem with the novel is whether or not I'm producing a sturdy enough tissue for that tension, since it's so miserably low in its lows and in its highs it approaches goofiness. I'm trying to find a way to avoid trivializing the serious stuff without undermining the comedy of it.

INTERVIEWER

Are there any contemporary American writers you especially admire or feel affinities with?

McGUANE

Nobody very surprising, I suspect: I like Barry Hannah, Raymond Carver, Harry Crews, Don Carpenter, Don DeLillo, Jim Harrison, Joan Didion. DeLillo has categorized a certain kind of fiction in a way that seems absolutely definitive: "around-the-house-and-in-the-yard fiction." There are a lot of good writers who belong to that group—a lot of recent women writers are in that school, for example, and many of them are tremendously good. At the same time, writers with broad streaks of fancifulness or writers who have trained themselves on Joyce or Gogol, as I did, may feel a little reproached when we compare ourselves to these writers who write about the bitter, grim, domestic aspects of living. You feel, gee, I'm pretty frivolous compared to these serious people. Sometimes this can be a misleading reproach because you may decide that you need to change your subject matter if you're going to be a serious writer.

INTERVIEWER

Have comparisons to Hemingway been an albatross for you?

McGUANE

There's a lot I like about Hemingway's writing, so when people say there are Hemingwayesque aspects to my writing, what am I supposed to say? Within the last year, writers as disparate as

Cheever, Malamud and Carver have been accused of Hemingwayism. When people say that, they're attacking you. Hemingway lived a kind of life that I would like to have lived, although I've never identified with him closely. I see Hemingway as being a real American Tory, the sort of guy I couldn't have gotten along with, and I see a cruelty and heaviness in his personality. When I was growing up, I was very much in rebellion against the Midwestern, Protestant values he represents to me, so a lot of these Hemingway comparisons have seemed a mile off. His world view was much more bleak than mine, more austere, and his insistence on his metaphysical closed system was very deterministic, fanatically expressed. Still I have to say that there was a time when I would read his stuff and it seemed wonderful. I read books of his today that I still love. But when I look at a lot of his writing now I come across that clipped Hemingway rhythm, and it can have an appalling, scriptural feeling to it. At his best he was a fabulous writer. I just read an interview with Heinrich Böll and he acknowledged that Hemingway's surface was a carpentry that you just couldn't walk by without acknowledging. Any writer who says he has walked by without noticing it is a liar.

INTERVIEWER

Your presentation of female characters seems to have changed distinctly for the better over the years.

MCGUANE

First of all, I would like to concur with Malcolm Lowry in saying that a writer is under no obligation to create great characters. Nevertheless, part of the explanation for my portrayal of women in my earlier works has to do with my trying to find my way through a problem that a lot of men from my generation have: the attitude that you weren't even *supposed* to know anything about women, that they were frightening or something to be made fun of. When I went back to my high school's twenty-fifth reunion recently, I noticed that the men immediately went right back into the adversarial business that we had shared back in the fifties. When I was growing up men

and women were raised in the atmosphere of what used to be called “the war of the sexes.” One of the macho-comic aspects of *The Bushwhacked Piano* was to deal ruthlessly with the women in the novel, using satire as a purgative. I hope, though, that I’m coming closer to an authentic presentation of women in my recent books, a vision that maybe has something to do with me casting off some of my own ignorance about women. I’d say that a big part of my education about women has come from having three daughters. I wonder what type of place I’m helping to prepare for them, what societal vices I’m perpetuating for them. These are the kind of moral issues I want to deal with in my writing. I don’t sit around worrying about what nations are invading other nations; I don’t understand those issues.

INTERVIEWER

Working here at the ranch must make your writing habits



At some point during the production of this issue, Tom McGuane was asked if he might supply some snapshots—of his family, his friends, his ranch—to accompany the text of this interview. “No snapshots,” he wrote back, “but I enclose a stock certificate in my AMAZINGLY unsuccessful ranch.”

a lot different than those of most writers. What kind of routine do you have?

MCGUANE

Let me give you what my dream day would be, if I could stick to it. It would be to get up early, get all the horses and cattle fed so that wouldn't be hanging over our heads, eat a bowl of cereal and make some coffee, and then go to some really comfortable place and just read for three or four hours. Most of my morning reading for the past ten years has been some form of remedial reading, my personal list of things I feel I should have read, all those books that make me feel less than prepared when I sit down as a writer. For example, this last year during the winter—a season when I have lots of time to read here—I read the King James Old Testament. I'd never read it. I've known for thirty years that I was supposed to have read it, but I never did. All this type of reading is a steady scrubbing away of the possibilities of guilt, of the fear of pulling my punches when I sit down to write because I feel inadequate in my education. I think you should expect a writer to be a true man of literature—he should know what the hell he's talking about, he should be a professional. So this kind of preparation is one thing I'm trying to get covered, knowing, of course, it's a lifetime project. Anyway, after I read I spend three or four hours in the afternoon writing, and then I go back working on the horses until dinnertime comes, eat dinner, and then spend the evening reading things I just want to read until it's time to go to sleep. Of course, lots of things go wrong with that schedule. Part of it depends on the season, and there's days you've promised to do things with the children, or days you'd rather go fishing or hunting, or days when there's a problem with a horse and it takes four hours to get it straightened out. But that's the pattern I strive for.

INTERVIEWER

What comes first when you begin new work?

MCGUANE

I hate to keep speaking in analogies—Charles Olson said that

the Sumerian word for “like” meant both “like” and “corpse,” and that the death of a good sentence is an analogue — but with some things you just have to use them. When I start something it’s like being a bird dog getting a smell; it’s a matter of running it down in prose and then trying to figure out what the thing is that’s out there. Sometimes it might be a picture. This morning when I was writing I was chasing down one of those images. It was just a minute thing that happened to me while I was recently down in Alabama. We had rented a little cottage on the edge of Mobile Bay and at one point there was stormy weather out on the bay; I wandered out to see what kind of weather it was and the door blew closed and locked me out of the cottage. I thought about getting back inside and I sat down and there was one of those semi-tropical warm summer rains starting to come down like buckshot. Somehow the image of stepping outside to see what’s going on and having the wind blow the door shut has stuck in my head. I don’t know what that image *is* exactly, or what it means, but I know that ever since I came home I’ve been trying to pursue that image in language, find out what it is. That image begins to ionize the prose and narrative particles around it so that words are drawn in, people and language begin to appear. That’s when things are going well. When that’s happening, any reader will recognize that flame-edge of discovery, that excitement of proceeding on the page that is shared between the reader, the writer, and the page. You’re feeling that gathering energy as it burns through the page. And it’s not a made-up thing that you’ve laid on the page, it’s an edge that you feel going through it. To me, it has always come in narrative form. Sometimes the process draws in these adversarial relationships, as with these rivalries, which are not a conscious thing on my part.

INTERVIEWER

Once this “ionization process” begins to occur, do you know in advance where these relationships are going to be taking you? Or is it a process of discovery for you?

McGUANE

The latter. I begin to feel where the fiction is going on its

own and then I begin to guess at what the consequences of certain things would be. Let's say that you're riding your bicycle on a warm October day down the old road in front of the ranch here, and you're three miles from the house and you begin to think, what if it starts to snow? That's the kind of question I begin to ask while I'm writing. I may only have written about the bicycle ride and then I start thinking about the snow, positing the things that could happen. It's a cloud chamber: you have these clouds first and then you drive electrical charges through it and things begin to take shape. That's how I write — with a lot of "what if's?" Procedurally what I do before I start is to make a deal with myself that I am willing to revise to any degree that is necessary. I have to make that deal in a very sincere way: I assume I have all the time in the world to finish a book because I know it may take many revisions before I get it right. *Ninety-Two in the Shade* took six or seven complete drafts. Once I've made that deal with myself, I'm free because as I'm writing I can try any kind of expansion of the armature of the novel as it goes, knowing that if it doesn't work, that's okay, I can try something else. I'm not going to say, "God, there's fifty pages I've just wasted." I don't let myself think in those terms. I'll also admit that I've outlined every book I've ever written before I've started it. Then I've thrown out every outline relatively early on. It continues to seem important to make those outlines because their wrongness energizes what I finally find, whereas that doesn't seem to happen if I simply start and roll on. But if I begin by trying to live up to the outline and then find forceful reasons not to use it, then I'm getting somewhere.

INTERVIEWER

Could you talk about how you decide to leave things *out* of a book? In *Nobody's Angel*, for example, you chose to leave out the scene where Patrick discovers that his sister is dead.

MCGUANE

Whether or not that was a good idea I can't comment on, but here's the way I arrived at it: I decided that the situation had been prepared for to the degree that the reader's version

of it would be better than the writer's. I also thought there was a grave danger of having almost *anything* that was said seem to be a trivialization of it. So I decided to say nothing. That was a tough choice and it wasn't a choice where I did it and immediately knew it was exactly the right thing; it was just my best judgment under the circumstances. I'm very interested in what's left out in fiction and in the stops a writer imposes on his material. Montaigne said that there's no better way that the power of a horse can be seen as in a neat and clean *stop*. There are great cutting horses who can run and run continuously, making all kinds of moves back and forth, but they're limited horses because they don't know when and where to stop. A *great* horse, though, like that roan out in back, will make a tremendous move and then *stop*: he knows that the cow is held, even though the cow is in a complete state of confusion, and he'll hold that position until he is threatened again by a cow trying to return to the herd, and then *crack*, he'll start again and then *stop*. This is so much more powerful a thing for an animal to do than simply roaring back and forth in front of the herd to prevent that cow from returning by sheer athletics.

INTERVIEWER

You lay your plots out for readers differently in each of your books.

McGUANE

Sure. Imagine a good gambler who is playing an important poker hand: the way he lays his cards down makes all the difference. With a certain number of cards, a certain number of the enemy are falling off their chairs, so the sequence of the cards can often determine who wins the hands. A writer needs to play his hand very carefully; he doesn't need to play fifty-two card pickup with the reader and throw the whole deck in his face just because he's got control of the deck. That's not playing cards at all.

INTERVIEWER

One suspects that you've probably identified with all your

main characters fairly strongly. Is that identification essential to your creative processes, or could you write a book from a perspective that is utterly foreign to you?

MCGUANE

Writing a book from that kind of a perspective is one of the things I love to plan to do, but I wonder if I could ever do it. I was trained on protagonist-centered fiction, and the first way I learned to write was to view the world from a single perspective — the protagonist's. I often wonder, given how much work it is, whether or not I could go the distance in a full-length novel in a point of view which is utterly alien to my own. I wonder how inventive I would be with that form. Nabokov obviously could do it, but he's so detached. And he is far more boring than it is proper to admit. The game-level is much higher in his kind of work, just as it is with Robert Coover, or Borges, or any of those other systems writers. But for some reason I've never been drawn to that kind of fiction.

INTERVIEWER

You've said that you've never been very interested in the movies and don't really know much about it. Didn't that make the move from writing fiction to writing screenplays seem especially difficult?

MCGUANE

No, it didn't seem difficult. It's a bit harder if you've been writing screenplays to go back to writing fiction. Especially after you've seen some movies made from screenplays, you know there's no sense in your doing a lot of interior decorating because somebody else is going to be building the sets. So you just write "Interior, the First Security Bank," in your script and that's all the evocation of atmosphere that you need to supply. Then you write the dialogue. Once you've written screenplays and you go back to writing fiction, you realize the weight of being the full production company for the novel.

INTERVIEWER

Has your involvement with screenplays affected your notion of fiction writing?

McGUANE

It's made me rethink the role of a lot of the mnemonic things that most novelists leave in their books. The worst about these things is probably Faulkner, who frequently had his shit detector dialed down to zero. We all read Faulkner in a similar way: we move through these muddy bogs until we hit these wonderful streaks, and then we're back in the bogs again, right? Everyone agrees that Faulkner produced the greatest streaks in American literature from 1929 until 1935 but, depending on how you feel about this, you either admit that there's a lot of dead air in his works or you don't. After you've written screenplays for a while, you're not as willing to leave these warm-ups in there, those pencil sharpenings and refillings of the whiskey glasses and those sorts of trivialities. You're more conscious of dead time. Playwrights are even tougher on themselves in this regard. Twenty mediocre pages hardly hurt even a short novel but ten dead minutes will insure that a play won't get out of New Haven. Movies are like that: people just can't sit there, elbow-to-elbow with each other and stand ten boring minutes in a movie. Oh, they will to a degree if they're prepared enough about the historical moment, if they're watching *Gandhi* or something, but not usually. At any rate, I think I go more for blood now, scene by scene in my writing, than maybe I would if I had never had that movie training. But basically it would be more appropriate to ask me if having to do my own grocery shopping has affected my writing. According to reviewers, I've spent the last ten years of my life in Hollywood, but to tell the truth I have logged less than thirty days in Los Angeles. Total. I do have one level of interest in movies, and that's that I like to read screenplays. They're little books. If I hear there's a wonderful new movie out and I can get my hands on the screenplay, I'll read that rather than go to see the movie itself. I enjoy

shooting the movie in my mind. I love to read plays for the same reason.

INTERVIEWER

You once said, "Contrary to what people think, the cinema has enormously to do with language." Do you mean that the cinema relies on dialogue?

MCGUANE

There's only one thing that you can't be without when you set about putting together a movie deal: you can't do without a script, the "material." This material is always some kind of bundle of language, it's a book or a screenplay. You can't take any director in the world and go to a financing entity (like a studio or a bank) and make a deal without that bundle of language. Producers always come back to the same point: who's got the book or who's got the best hundred and twenty pages of writing? Yet that point is often disguised. Screenwriters are not particularly prized members of the moviemaking community, and as soon as things get rolling suddenly it's the director who's the star, or an actor. But when that movie is over and they're ready to go back and make another one, suddenly they're desperate for a writer or a book. That's the irreducible element in the moviemaking business. And in most movies you go to, the characters are continually talking. You get the impression in reading from the *auteur*-theory days of cinematic criticism that there's no conversation in films, that they're all silent movies. And yet if a Martian were to come down and analyze what's happening in films, he'd say, "These humans never shut up. They have pictures of humans and they're talking all the time. They get in machines and they talk in the machines and then they lean out of the window of one machine and talk into the window of another machine."

INTERVIEWER

One of the legends that grew out of your work on *The Missouri Breaks* was that you wrote the script and then Marlon

Brando showed up wanting to change everything. Supposedly you two holed up for a week in a motel to thrash things out. Any truth to that story?

McGUANE

None. The closest thing there was to that story is that Brando did have ways he wanted to do that film: he wanted to be an Indian and he had two pet wolves that he wanted to be in the movie; moreover, he wanted these wolves to kill the girl's father, wanted them to jump up on the girl's father's horse and eat him. So I was told to go out to Los Angeles and see Brando and get the wolf stuff stopped. I went out there and Brando was at home and I spent a couple of days with him. I had a wonderful time but we never talked about the movie at all. We just talked about literature. You know, he's a very erudite guy and really smart, a kind of crazy-connections smart. At the time he was reading a history of the Jesuits in Minnesota and a book about Louis Leakey's skulls and the prehomnids in Africa. He'd get up in the morning and dress, gather all of his books together, and then get back in bed with his clothes on and read all day. He's on the verge of being downright scholarly. So that's what we did there, and when he eventually went off and did the movie he wasn't an Indian. I still don't know *what* he was. He was this kind of tubby Irish killer. I know many people hated that goofy, wild humor he injected into the movie but I appreciated it.

INTERVIEWER

What about your involvement with movie directing? I would imagine that directing *Ninety-Two in the Shade* must have been a difficult task for various reasons: it was your first film, it was based on your own novel, you were unfamiliar with the technical aspects of moviemaking . . .

McGUANE

The technical aspects of moviemaking aren't that complex, and anyone who's ever directed would say that. There are tech-

nical components of the movies that are very complicated but no director knows them. Maybe Hal Ashby or Nick Roeg and a few other guys know the editing process, which is impossibly difficult to figure out, but I don't know of any director who really understands what the state-of-the-art sound or camera equipment is. For that kind of technical know-how you have to rely on your cameraman or sound man to give you what you want to see and hear, or on your editor to give you the narrative sequentiality you want. A director has to rely on the people around him. I had never directed before, and I'm not particularly delighted with the job I did, but at the same time it became clear pretty fast that this was just another typewriter and I had to sit there and write as good a tale as I could.

INTERVIEWER

Instead of having Skelton killed at the end, you changed the conclusion of the movie and gave it a kind of wacky, funny ending. Given the kind of relationship that was developing between Skelton and Nichol, I could believe the new ending, but I wondered what your own thoughts were in making that change.

MCGUANE

First of all, unless you have a lot of money in your budget, you're forced to shoot out of sequence. So as I started doing the film I began wondering about the relationships of all the different parts, and I wound up shooting the ending both ways. You just happened to see a version of the movie with the happy ending; other people see it and it has the other ending. It was released with both endings and they tried to find the one that would play best. That's called not having the final cut.

INTERVIEWER

Which ending do you think works best?

MCGUANE

The ending as it was in the book is probably the better of the two, but the happy ending was fun and I thought it was amusing with Warren Oates reading that crazy letter and his

angler going off into that surrealist Zululand, wading ashore with his trophy.

INTERVIEWER

Are you interested in directing other movies?

McGUANE

I don't think so. Strangely enough I was offered the directorship of *A Star is Born*. Cute, huh? But while I was making *Ninety-Two in the Shade*, I remember thinking what a pale experience it was compared to writing fiction. At first it was rather frightening, with all these people around and a lot of equipment and a lot of power-tripping going on, but then soon it had become as if I were trying to say something with this extremely ungainly typewriter. I kept thinking over and over, this is so much less good than writing fiction, because I'd get an idea and then I'd have to move all this junk around to shoot it, and then by the time I did that, inertia had set in again. That's why movies have to be so well planned, because that's the last chance you have to be really inventive; there's not much room for invention at the process level. At any rate, I don't think I'd want to direct again.

INTERVIEWER

Does writing about Montana, or about the West in general, present some special challenges for a writer?

McGUANE

Part of the difficulty for me has to do with the lack of attachment between people and place that I was talking about earlier. So an aspect of this crisis lode that I'm trying to mine as a fiction writer is that I have to make some kind of ligature of connection between people and place. That has to happen, but it doesn't happen here in the West, as has often been thought, by simply stationing human beings in this grand landscape. There's actually something much stronger than that going on between people and places out here. It's more numinous in the sense that "place" for my little daughter Annie is that

tree which keeps the heat off her while she's on the swing set. That's what place is for her much of the day and that's what place is for anybody else, even though the *nature* of that place is different for someone from Montana than it is for someone from New Jersey, somehow. It's not different simply in the calendaresque way, but it's hard to pin down how place really affects people. Somebody said that nobody is born a Southern writer — Poe is not a "Southern writer" — it's something you elect to be; you let place influence you or you decide it doesn't. I know people from Texas or Montana who are absolutely urbane. Do we think of Donald Barthelme as being a Southern writer? Or Tom Wolfe? But I know people from Cairo, Illinois, who consider themselves to be deeply Southern.

INTERVIEWER

You're obviously one of those writers who has chosen to be influenced by place.

MCGUANE

I want to find a way to profit from having spent half my life out here, particularly the half of my life that has been superimposed on a really fragmented upbringing. I've struggled to have a sense of place; as a kid I was always saying, "When I grow up I'm going to go and live at Uncle Bill's house in Sakonnet and work on a lobster boat." But very early on I decided that as soon as I could I was going to go out West. I did, at fifteen, when I went out and worked on a ranch, so my fantasy life became my real life. Today, even though that fantasy is one of the most banal elements of my life, I'm still excited about it. I certainly don't want to become one of those regional writers who collect funny phrases, but I do think you can use nature to charge a fictional landscape with powerful results. I have no interest in replicating Montana or rendering landscapes in a recognizable way, but I do know there is something forceful about these landscapes that should turn up in language.

INTERVIEWER

Is the myth about men and women being freer out here in the West really true?

McGUANE

The air of the fresh start is alive here. People are willing to accept the idea that you can pull your life out of the fire and turn it around completely. It's an echo of gold mining days.

INTERVIEWER

Or the story of some Midwestern kid who comes out here, becomes a famous writer, and winds up being Montana's cutting horse champion for three straight years.

McGUANE

Sounds improbable, doesn't it? As time goes by, I feel closer to Ring Lardner, Sherwood Anderson, Scott Fitzgerald—drifters from the Midwest. You fetch up somewhere. It just happens.

—Sinda Gregory
Larry McCaffery

Charles Wright

A Journal of True Confessions

Power rigs drift like lights out past the breakwater,
white, and fluorescent white,
The sea moving them up and down
In the burgeoning dawn,
up and down,
White as they drift and flicker over the salmon run,
Engines cut, or cut back,
Trolling herring bait or flasher lures,
the sea moving them up and down,
The day's great hand unfolding
Its palm as the boats drift with the tide's drift:
All morning we slipped among them,
Ray at the boat's wheel
Maneuvering, baiting the double hooks, tying and cutting,
Getting the depth right,
Mark and I
Watching the rods as their almost-invisible lines
Trailed through the boat's wake,
waiting for each to dip:
And when it came
We set the drag and played him,
the salmon jumping and silver,
Then settled like quick foil in the net's green . . .
Later, ground zero, the Straits of Juan de Fuca
sliding the fog out
Uncharacteristically, sunlight letting its lines down
For a last run,
glint from the water like flecked scales,

I can write a simple, declarative English sentence,
Mancini said.

drinking a Stinger and leaning back
In his green chair above the Arno.

And not many can say that,

He added, running the peppermint taste
Around on his tongue.

Out on the river,
Down below Prato, the sun was lowering its burned body
Into the shadows.

Happy birthday, Lieutenant,
 He quipped, and ordered another round.
 Twenty-four years ago, and dog days, indeed, Fortunatus.
 Six months later

(flash-forward across the Aegean),
Tell Laura I Love Her PAed the ship's lounge, the Captain's
 arm
 Around my shoulders, full moonlight and Jesus
 everything in the sky
 Was beautiful . . .

I ducked out and turned back down to Second Class,
His sweet invective lotioning my right ear.
And Stingers that night as well, for hours out of Piraeus,
Mancini grinning like Ungaretti,
And then he said What?

The stars are fastening their big buckles
and flashy night shoes,
Thunder chases its own tail down the sky,

My forty-ninth year, and all my Southern senses called to
horn,
August night hanging like cobwebs around my shoulders:
How existential it all is, really,
the starting point always the starting point
And what's-to-come still being the What's-To-Come.
Some friends, like George, lurk in the memory like locusts,
while others, flat one-sided fish
Looking up, handle themselves like sweet stuff:
look out for them, look out for them.

—25 August 1984

Cicadas wind up their one note to a breaking point.
The sunlight, like fine thread, opens and closes us.
The wind, its voice like grasshopper's wings,
rises and falls.
Sadness is truer than happiness.
Walking tonight through the dwarf orchard,
The fruit trees seem etched like a Dürer woodcut against
the sky,
The odd fruit
buried in bas-relief,
The moon with its one foot out of the clouds,
All twenty-one trees growing darker in a deepening dark.
When the right words are found I will take them in and
be filled through with joy
My mouth will be precious then,
as your mouth is precious.
If you want to hear me, you'll have to listen again.
You'll have to listen to what the wind says,
whatever its next direction

—9 September 1984

It's all such a matter of abstracts—

love with its mouth wide open,

Affection holding its hand out,

Impalpable to the impalpable—

No one can separate the light from the light.

They say that he comes with clouds,

The faithful witness,

the first begotten of the dead.

And his feet are like fine brass,

His voice the perpetual sound of many waters.

The night sky is darker than the world below the world,

The stars medieval cathedral slits from a long way.

This is the dark of the *Metamorphoses*

When sparks from the horses' hooves

showed us Persephone

And the Prince's car in its slash and plunge toward Hell.

Seventy-four years ago today,

Dino Campana, on the way back

From his pilgrimage on foot

To the holy chill of La Verna inside the Apennines

to kiss the rock where St. Francis received the Stigmata,

Stopped in a small inn at Monte Filetto

And sat on a balcony all day

staring out at the countryside,

The hawks circling like lost angels against the painted

paradise of the sky,

The slope below him

a golden painting hung from the walnut tree:

The new line will be like the first line,

spacial and self-contained,

Firm to the touch

But intimate, carved, as though whispered into the ear.

— 25 September 1984

The dragon maple is shedding its scales and wet sides,
Scuffs of cloud bump past the Blue Ridge
 looking for home,
Some nowhere that's somewhere for them,
The iris teeter and poke on their clubbed feet:
October settles its whole weight in a blue study.

I think of the great painters in light like this,
 Morandi's line
Drawn on the unredemptive air, Picasso's cut
Like a laser into the dark hard of the mystery,
Cézanne with his cross-tooth brush and hook,
And sad, immaculate Rothko,
 whose line was no line at all,
His last light crusted and weighed down,
 holes within holes,
This canvas filled with an emptiness, this one half-full . . .
Like the sky over Locust Avenue. Like the grass.

—5 October 1984

What disappears is what stays . . .
O'Grady stories abound.
Born one day later than I was, my alter ego,
He points at me constantly
Across the years
from via dei Giubbonari in Rome, spring 1965,
Asking me where the cadence is,
Dolce vitaed and nimbus-haired,
where's the measure we talked about
His finger blurs in my eye.
Outside the picture,
the Largo looms in the bleached distance behind his back.
I look for it, Desmond, I look for it constantly
In the long, musical shape of the afternoon,
in the slice of sunlight pulled

Through the bulge of the ash trees
Opening like a lanced ache in the front yard,
In the sure line the mockingbird takes
 down from the privet hedge
And over the lawn where the early shade
Puddles like bass chords under the oak,
In the tangent of 4 P.M., in the uncut grass,
 in the tangle and tongue-tie it smooths there . . .
But our lines seem such sad notes for the most part,
Pinned like reliquaries and stop-gaps
 to the cloth effigy of some saint
Laid out in the public niche
Of a mission or monastery—
St. Xavier hear me,
 St. Xavier hear my heart,
Give my life meaning, Heal me and take me in,
The dust like a golden net from the daylight outside
Over everything,
 candles chewing away at the darkness with their numb
teeth.

—19 October 1984

According to Freud, Leonardo da Vinci made up a wax
paste
For his walks from which
 he fashioned delicate animal figurines,
Hollow and filled with air.
When he breathed into them, they floated
Like small balloons, twisting and turning,
 released by the air
Like Li Po's poems downriver, downwind
to the undergrowth and the sunlight's dissembling balm.
What Freud certainly made of this
Is one thing.

What does it mean to you,

Amber menagerie swept from his sun-struck and amber
hands?

Giorgio Vasari told it first,

and told us this one as well:

A wine-grower from Belvedere
Found an uncommon lizard and gave it to Leonardo
Who made wings for it out of the skins
Of other lizards,

and filled the wings with mercury
Which caused them to wave and quiver
Whenever the lizard moved.

He made eyes, a beard and two horns
In the same way, tamed it, and kept it in a large box
To terrify his friends.

His games were the pure games of children,
Asking for nothing but artifice, beauty and fear.

— 20 October 1984

Function is form, form function back here where the fruit
trees

Strip to November's music,

And the black cat and the tortoise-shell cat

crouch and slink,

Crouch and slink toward something I can't see

But hear the occasional fateful rustlings of,

Where the last tomatoes seep

from their red skins through the red dirt,

And sweet woodruff holds up its smooth grey sticks

Like a room full of boys

all wanting to be excused at the same time:

The song of white lights and power boats,

the sails of August and late July devolve

To simple description in the end,

Something about a dark suture

Across the lawn,
 something about the way the day snips
It open and closes it
When what-comes-out has come out
 and burns hard in its vacancy,
Emerging elsewhere restructured and restrung,
Like a tall cloud that all the rain has fallen out of.

The last warm wind of summer
 shines in the dogwood trees
Across the street, flamingoing berries and cupped leaves
That wait to be cracked like lice
Between winter's fingernails.
 The season rusts to these odd stains
And melodramatic stutterings
In the bare spots of the yard, in the gutter angles
Brimming with crisp leftovers,
 and gulled blooms in the rhododendrons,
Veneer, like a hard wax, of nothing on everything.

—3 November 1984

You Leave Them

Mona Simpson

I wonder what we looked like then, that day we drove over into California. My mother could probably still tell you what we wore. We were driving to California from Bay City, Wisconsin, just the two of us, so I could be a television star. We'd taken Ted's Mobil Credit Card and stayed in motels, charging gasoline and Cokes on the bills. We dug up to our shoulders in the ice chests, bringing the cold pop bottles up like a catch.

We'd stolen vegetables all across America, anything we could eat without cooking. My mother spotted the trucks.

"Oh, Ann. Look. Peas," she'd say. The trucks of peas were open-backed, the vines clumped in bundles. We followed those trucks anywhere, turning off into towns we'd never heard of and then waiting till the first stoplight, when my mother sent me out with a five dollar bill to the driver. The windows of the cabs were high and I had to jump to knock. The drivers never touched our money. They shrugged and smiled and said, You go on ahead, take what you want, then. And we loaded up the whole back seat of the car, from the floor to the roof, with the sweet, heavy-scented vines.

Sometimes on the highway loads of peas would drop off the

truckbeds and bounce right on the concrete like tumbleweed. We pulled onto the gravel shoulder and ran out and chased them, laughing on the hot empty road, the flat country still on all sides of us.

That last morning in Nevada we'd bought nine melons, big melons, each too heavy for one hand. We'd tasted samples from toothpicks on ragged, wet paper plates. We'd never imagined how many kinds of melons there could be. And they were all sweet.

But when we crossed the Nevada border some men made us stop. We couldn't take our melons into California. It was still not noon and already hot. We had pulled onto the shoulder of the road. When the man told us we couldn't bring our melons in, my mother stood outside of the car and cried. She talked to him, saying the same things again and again, while he shook his head no. He seemed to have all the time in the world. A green fly landed on his forehead and it took him forty seconds to lift up his hand and shoo it. I backed the car onto the grass and started hauling out melons. My mother screamed. I was twelve years old. I wasn't supposed to know how to drive.

We didn't have a knife or anything. We split the melons open, smashing them on the legs of the sign that said "WELCOME TO CALIFORNIA" and we stood on the concrete platform eating them, the juice spilling down our arms.

Our shirts were still sticky and sweet smelling, but the bad, sour side of sweet, when we drove into Los Angeles. My mother had called ahead for reservations at one of the hotels she'd read about, but she said she wouldn't go there right away.

"Huh-uh. Look at us. And look at this car. We're going to clean up a little first."

"Why? They're used to it, they're a hotel, aren't they?"

"Honey, the Bel Air isn't just a hotel." She had the tone she always used when she was too tired to fight. "You'll see."

"Why can't we wash up there?"

"Because. That's why. You just don't."

She parked in front of a restaurant near the campus of

U.C.L.A. "This looks like a good little place. And we can have a bite to eat. Hamburger Hamlet it's called. Cute."

My mother took our gingham dresses from the trunk. They were still in their dry-cleaning cellophane. Two men leaned against the building. They had tie-dyed sheets spread out on the sidewalk with buckles and leather belts for sale. We stood there looking down, entranced. They were slow and graceful, smoking.

"What are you looking at? Come on," she said. The Ladies' Room in the restaurant was upstairs. "Those kids are on drugs," my mother whispered. "They're hooked on marijuana." She'd read about drugs. She always read the magazines. Even then she knew what drugs were.

In the restroom, my mother plugged her steam rollers into the wall socket, and unpacked her cosmetics and soaps, lining them up on the counter. She used the row of sinks as if this were her own huge dressing room. She turned on the hand dryer, and touched up her nails, holding them under the warm air.

She washed, shaved her underarms and ripped open a fresh package of nylons. She stood in pantyhose and a bra and started on her makeup. She clipped the hot rollers in her hair. Strangers touched their hands under thin streams of water in the sink furthest from us and my mother didn't notice. She was driven. The will to be clean.

"Ann," she called then, looking for me in the mirror. I was standing by the door. "Comemeer."

"My name is Heather," I said. While we were driving she told me I could pick a new name for myself in California. It would be my television name.

"Heather, then. You know who I mean." She sniffed me. "You smell," she said, and handed me a towel. "Let's have some scrubbing action. Get undressed and hurry it up."

I washed standing on one leg, the other foot on my knee, swishing the towel around lightly. Other women's faces sealed the mirror. My mother didn't notice women leaving the restroom but she saw that I was embarrassed. All of a sudden she saw that. And it must have seemed like a defeat. She'd driven all that way and now we were here and I was ashamed of her.

She sighed one of her sighs. "Come here," she said. She

brushed blush on my cheeks. "Listen. Nobody cares, do you hear? They don't give a hoot. They can think we wanted to wash up before we ate. They can see that we've been traveling. They don't want you to stay dirty."

I must have looked pale standing there, because she pushed some lipstick over my lips. They were chapped and I wouldn't stand still, so she smeared a little and licked her finger to clean the edge of my mouth. I ran over to the sink and spat. I tasted her saliva, it was different than mine.

I felt something then, as I stood watching my spit twirl down the drain. I wanted to get away from her. There was nowhere I could go. I was twelve. She'd have me six more years.

My mother examined us in the mirror and sighed in relief. She held my chin and looked at us both. She'd been right. We did look much better. She gathered our things back into the suitcase and snapped the buckle shut. "See, all done," she said. "Doesn't it feel good to be clean?"

We found eight car washes in Westwood that afternoon but they were all the drive-through kind. My mother wasn't going to trust them with our Lincoln.

"You wouldn't do it by *hand*?" She was standing on the blacktop talking to a boy who looked as if she were asking for the world. I scowled, embarrassed again. Everything she did embarrassed me. "I mean, I'll pay you. *Extra*. I just don't want those hard detergents on it. They'll hurt the finish." She ran her hand on the car top. It was still smooth and new.

"You can wash it yourself, lady," the boy said, walking off. He walked as if the whole parking lot were his own.

My mother sat back down in the car. "You know, I guess we could," she said. "I guess we could do it ourselves."

She started to unpack the backseat.

"Heather, go." She gave me a five dollar bill. "Give him this and say we want rags for the windows and stuff to clean the seats. Oh, and ask if they have a little vacuum cleaner, too. Go on."

She already had the trunk open and our suitcase out.

It was a long walk to where the boy stood hosing off the wheels

of a jeep. "Hurry up," my mother yelled, but I kept sluffing. I didn't care about the car being clean. If it was mine, I'd have just left it dirty. She would say I never learned to take care of a thing.

I stood with the five dollar bill stuck in my hand, looking down at the cement ramps under the gas pumps.

"Could we please buy rags and cleaning stuff and also possibly rent a vacuum cleaner?"

The kid laughed. "What kind of cleaning stuff?"

I shrugged. "For the outside and for the seats."

"Gonna do it yourself, huh?"

"She wants to."

He put the hose down, not turning it off, so a stream of water dribbled down the blacktop. He stuffed a bucket with rags and plastic bottles. "You'll have to pull up here for the vacuum," he said, "You just pull on up when you're ready."

"Thank you."

"I don't know how much to charge you for this stuff. Five dollars's probably too much. You're not going to use that much fluid."

"She might. You better take it."

He laughed. "She might, huh? She always like that?"

I felt my top lip pulling down over my teeth. "She's usually not that bad." I was looking down at my shoes. "We just moved here. Just today."

"Oh, I see. Well, makes sense. Anxious to get the car cleaned, huh?"

"Yeah."

We looked at each other a little longer, his chin tucked down against his neck and his eyes dropping open, until my mother called.

"Heather, hurry it up. It's already four o'clock."

"That your name, Heather?" he said, picking up his hose again.

"Yeah," I said. "Thanks."

Torches flared on both sides of the road that led to the Bel Air Hotel. The path wound in and out of woods. My mother

drove slowly. She parked underneath the awning. I moved to get out but she stopped me and told me to wait. She rested her hands on the steering wheel the way she used to for years on top of my shoulders. The valet came out and opened the doors, her door first and then mine. She wasn't shy to relinquish the car anymore. There was nothing embarrassing in it. It was clean. The leather smelled of Windex.

At the desk a man shuffled through his book. "We've put you in the tower, which is a lovely room, but there's only one bed. A double. I'm afraid it's all we have left."

My mother let a frown pass over her face, for appearances. We'd slept in doubles all the way across America. She didn't like to sleep alone. I did. She was frowning for me to see, too.

"That will be all right." She shrugged.

Following the valet to our room, we let ourselves relax. I bumped against the wall and she let me bump because I was clean. The stucco seemed to absorb amber evening light.

We walked through an outdoor courtyard. There was a small cafe; white tablecloths, white chairs, the distant slap and shuffle of late swimmers. People at the tables were drinking, lingering in daytime clothes. We climbed stone steps to the tower. My mother tipped the valet and then closed the door behind us. I had my arms crossed over my chest. She looked at me and asked, "What's the matter with you now? Don't tell me even this doesn't satisfy you."

She was looking around the room. And it was a beautiful hotel.

But I was thinking about us on our hands and knees, our butts sticking out the car door, scrubbing the melon juice stains off the leather. To me, the afternoon canceled out now. My mother was not that way. She could hold contrasts in her mind at once. She must have found me horribly plain.

"It's nice," I said.

A green and white polished cotton canopy shaded the four-poster bed. She kicked her shoes off and collapsed. I sat on the windowseat, my leg swinging over the side. My jacket hung on the back of a chair where I'd left it. She hooked it with her bare foot and brought it to her face. Then she tried it on, adjusting the collar.

I looked at her—she was standing on the bed, barefoot, her toenails polished a light shade of pink—“Take my jacket off,” I said, cranking the window open. It wasn’t warm but my arm was pumping as if I needed air.

“It fits me. You don’t know what a cute little shape I have, for a mother. Pretty darn good for my age.”

“Can we afford this place?” I wasn’t looking at her anymore. My face was out the window, gulping the night. I watched the waiters move, beautifully, around the glows of candles on the little tables. One man cupped his hand over a woman’s to light a cigarette. My mother’s fingers spidered on my back.

“I’ll worry about that, okay? I’m the adult and you’re the child. And don’t you forget that.”

“Don’t I wish I could.”

“Well, you can. So start right now.” She laughed, half a laugh.

“I’m hungry.”

“Should we call room service?”

“No, I want to go out.” I hardly ever said things like that. I didn’t want to be blamed for wanting too much, but that night it seemed worth it to get outside.

“I don’t know, I’d just as soon have something here, now that we’re parked and all. To tell the truth, I’m sick of this driving. You don’t know, you haven’t been doing it, but it tires you. You can’t believe how my shoulders feel. They ache, Heather-honey, they really ache. Twenty-one, twenty-two, let’s see, we left the fifth of August, do you realize, we’ve been on the road sixteen days. No, the fifth to the, today’s—”

“We can go here. You don’t have to drive. There’s a restaurant down there.”

Her head turned. She looked a little startled; she always did when she was interrupted. “Oh, okay, fine. That’s fine. It’s just this driving, seventeen days, day in, day out, eight hours behind the wheel and boy, you feel it, you feel it right—”

I stood up and walked to the door, my jacket hooked on one finger. “Let’s go.”

“Well, would you just wait a second, please, and let me wash my face? And I want to put on a little bit of makeup.”

I sat on the steps and listened to her vigorous washing. She

slapped her face, her feet thumping on the bathroom floor.

"It's going to be a few minutes," she said.

And it was. The sky went from pink to deep blue to black in the time it took my mother to get ready. I sat on the steps watching other people come to the café, sit down and drink, clinking glasses together. I saw a man reach over a table and rummage underneath a woman's hair, as if there were something to find.

When she stepped outside, I sniffed loudly to let her know I didn't like perfume. I was wearing my regular afternoon clothes, and she'd put on a long dress, with one slit up the back. She was the adult, I was the child. She wore pearls and heels, her hair was teased two inches out from her face.

"Well," she said, making noises around her, the pearls, the cotton rustling, "Are we ready?" She was talking in an octave higher than her normal voice, a voice to be overheard.

"What do you think?" I said, showing my hands in my pockets and starting down the stairs. She clattered behind me.

"Wait, wait, would you? Go a little slower, please. You don't know what it's like up here. I mean on these heels." She put her hands on my shoulders. "My balance isn't what it should be. It's fine, in the morning, I'm fine. But by this time of day, you're just going to have to slow down. Please."

"Why do you wear them, then?"

"Honey, you know. They look nice." She caught up to me then and grabbed my arm, falling a little. "At my age, they expect you to have a little height. And who knows, maybe I'll meet someone tonight, you never know. And I'd hate to meet the right man when I had on the wrong shoe."

But my mother seemed to gain balance when we waited at the café entrance. I was glad to be with her then. I was glad to have her in those shoes. I stood close by her when I was shy.

"Two for dinner?"

"Please," she said, her chin high, following him. She knew how to do those things.

We had a small table at the edge of the courtyard with its own glowing candle, like the rest. We didn't look at each other at first, we each looked at the people around us. I didn't see any free men for her.

My mother opened the menu. "Wow," she whispered, "A wee bit pricey."

"Room service would be just the same."

"Not necessarily. But that's okay. We're here now, so fine. Well, I know what I'm having. I'm having a glass of wine and a cup of soup." Even that was going to be expensive.

"I'm hungry," I said. I was mad. I wasn't going to have any soup or salad. If we could afford to stay here then we could afford to eat, and I was going to eat.

The waiter came and my mother ordered her glass of wine and cup of soup. "Is that all, ma'am?"

"I think so. We had a late lunch."

I ordered a steak and began answering the waiter's long string of questions. Baked potato. Oil and vinegar. Beans instead of rice.

My mother kicked my shin, hard, under the table.

"Didn't you want a hamburger? I don't know if you saw, but they have them."

"No, I'd rather have a steak."

"Oh, okay, fine. Whatever you want. It's just that you said you wanted a hamburger. You said it this afternoon."

Then the waiter left us alone. My mother leaned over the table and whispered. "Didn't you see me winking at you, you dummy? Didn't you feel me kick? I can't afford this. What do you think you're doing? Jesus. You saw what I ordered, didn't you? Don't you think I'm hungry? Am I supposed to starve myself so you can have a steak?"

"Why didn't you order yourself a steak?"

"Boy," she said, "I can't believe how dumb you are sometimes. We can't *afford* this."

"So why are we here? Why aren't we somewhere we can afford? I asked you upstairs and you said I shouldn't worry, that you were the adult and I was the child."

"Well, children order hamburgers when they go out to expensive restaurants. That's all they're allowed to order."

"Then why didn't you change it? Go ahead. Tell the waiter I can't have my steak."

"I don't believe you. You shouldn't have ordered it! You felt my foot under the table, you just wanted your steak. Well, fine,

you can have it now and you'd better enjoy it, because believe me, it's the last steak you'll get for a while."

She sank back into her chair, her arms lapsing on the armrests. Our waiter arrived with her wine.

"Everything all right?"

A smile came reflexively to her face. "Lovely, just lovely."

She'd had it with me. She pretended that she simply wasn't hungry. As if not wanting things was elegant, but wanting them and not being able to get them was not.

She leaned over the table again.

"If you were so hungry, why didn't you order more at lunch? You love hamburgers. You usually always order a hamburger."

"I do not *love* hamburgers."

"Yes you do." She sighed. "Why can't it ever just be nice? Why can't we ever just have a nice, relaxing time?"

"In other words why can't I just want a hamburger, why can't I want what you want me to want. Why don't I always just happen to want the cheapest thing on the menu?"

"That's what I do, why can't you?" she said. "Don't you think *I'm* hungry after all that driving?"

"You can have some of mine."

"No." She shook her head. "I don't want any. It's yours. You ordered it, now you eat it." She looked around the café. "There's nothing for me here. I wanted to just stay in and have something quick from room service. Not get all dressed up. I just wanted to relax for once."

Our food came and I stopped looking at her. I started cutting my steak. It was thick and glistening with fat. I put all four rounds of butter in the baked potato. Steam rose up in spirals. Then I shook on salt, spooned in sour cream. It looked delicious.

She took a sip of her soup. "So, how is it?"

I said fine, still looking at my plate.

"How's the salad? You haven't touched the salad."

"Uh huh," I said, still eating.

"Try the vegetables, you need those vitamins." She put down her spoon. "Would you like a bite of my soup? It's delicious, really, these little bits of carrot. They're grated very finely. I

wonder what they use. It tickles your throat when it goes down, like lots of little sparks."

She wasn't being mean anymore. She was even smiling.

"No thank you," I said.

She did the talking while I ate. "You know, you're really right. This is a lovely place. Lovely. The pool over there, can you hear it? That little glup, glup, glup? And this air. I love these warm, dry nights. I wonder how cold it gets in winter. I know we won't need really heavy coats, coats like we had at home, but do you think we'll even need any? Light coats? Sort of raincoat-ish? I'd love to have a trench."

I finally set my silverware down. I guess I was finally full. Now I looked around, too, and up at the starless sky. "The air is nice," I said.

"Are you finished with that?"

"What? Oh, the steak?"

"I thought if you were I'd try a bite."

I shoved the whole plate over to her side. I passed her the salad and the dish of vegetables.

"Oh, no, I just want a little bite."

"Try the vegetables. They're very good." I knew if she finished my dinner, that would be the last I'd hear about the bill.

She sighed and settled in her chair. "Oh, it is. Very, very good." She leaned over and whispered. "You know, for what you get, these prices aren't so bad. This is enough for the two of us, really. You know?"

Later the waiter came for our plates. All that was left was the parsley. "I'll take that," my mother said and grabbed the sprig from his tray. He must have thought we were famished, but my mother really always had liked parsley.

"Will that be all? Or can I get you some dessert and coffee?"

My mother winked. "No coffee, please. But I think we'd like to see a menu for dessert. And would you like a glass of milk, young lady?"

I looked up at the waiter. "I'd like coffee, please. With cream and sugar."

He left, to bring the dessert tray. My mother looked at me suspiciously and smiled. "Ann, now tell me, when did you learn

to drink coffee? Were you just bluffing or did you learn? Look me in the eye and tell me true."

We shared the cup when it came. She took a sip, then I took a sip.

"With you," I said. "I learned from you."

I could see her looking at me, wondering. But she let it go and she let the bill go too. Now, I'm glad that she did. You grow up and you leave them. She only had me six more years.



Exegetics

Jerzy Kosinski



What are you doing here?

I am face to face with Joseph Stalin in Lodz in 1950. I was then a freshman at the State University of Lodz, a Stalinist school in Stalinist Poland. It was early morning and I was late for an obligatory meeting of a student union. On my way to the auditorium, I ran into a Stalinist Party hack. He was waiting, camera in hand, to photograph me as a saboteur of "Be on Time: Socialism Won't Wait!" (the latest Party slogan) and publish it in the pages of the local Party Organ. As if that wasn't bad enough, take another look at Comrade Kosinski! I'm wearing a pre-war student hat — what you might call a reactionary "white flag." It's just as well that you can't see my tie, which should be red; in the picture it's *yellow*. As yellow as only an American yellow-polka-dot-bikini tie can be.

Now imagine being portrayed in the Party Organ as a bad case of "the American Imperialist yellow fever." In the totalitarian state, one picture with the wrong hat and the wrong tie can finish a man for life! Therefore, before he could take that picture, quickly I buttoned up my Polish-made top coat, I tied my Soviet-made scarf over my tie and I moved next to the poster of Generalissimo — the man who never wore a hat *or* a tie. There, posing patiently, I gave Stalin the eye.



What's the occasion for this gathering? Where are you?

Waiting for the dinner in my apartment, October 29, 1973. Carlos Fuentes and Arthur Miller have just usurped a place behind my desk—a sacrilege. No wonder I am talking to Philip Roth, who is on the right side of the desk.

What did you talk about?

I don't remember and the picture won't say. Besides, I find that when left with each other and to each other—without non-writers to distract them from each other—most writers are reluctant to talk shop. That's not profound enough. Instead, they prefer to talk about something quite profound—something they do (or could) write about—or something quite silly, something they could never commit to paper. Only Truman Capote could do both, and he's missing from the picture.

Anyone else missing?

Yes. Women.



Who are these people you are standing with?

Inge Morath, the wife of Arthur Miller, and Leopold Senghor, the President of Senegal. The occasion was the annual dinner of P.E.N. in the St. Regis Hotel. President Senghor was the keynote speaker. I was then the President of P.E.N.

Is this picture of particular interest?

Well, just as I was about to start the proceedings, a security man ran up and whispered to me that a ranking French diplomat and his wife had just arrived in the hotel lobby and couldn't get in without my verification. They'd forgotten their invitations. I murmured to the microphone, "I'll be right back." Then, leaving the other President, and everybody else for that matter, a bit baffled, I jumped down from the dais and, zigzagging between the tables, I ran through the ball-

room to the emergency express elevator—its doors kept open in case an attempt was going to be made on the lives of one or more of the presidents there.

Downstairs, I rushed over to the diplomat. He was fuming. "*Mais c'est incroyable!*"

"I'm sorry for the inconvenience, Excellency," I said. "I'm here to escort you, *et Madame*, to your table. Please follow me *tout de suite!*"

"It's about time! *Vous savez!*" the diplomat said, still very cross.

So, back up in the ballroom, in front of everyone, I led the distinguished latecomers all the way to their seats at the table closest to the dais—one of the most visible.

In a reflex as old as diplomacy, the dignitary dipped his hand into his pocket, took out a single crisp U.S. dollar, and trying to be discreet, he handed it to me in front of the whole ballroom. Of course, I accepted the tip, I think as graciously as any P.E.N. president would, and jumped back up on the dais.

Only when I was at the microphone, openly acknowledging his generous tip, did the diplomat recognize my position. "*Mais non!*" I heard him whisper loud enough for everybody to hear—and for everybody to laugh. "Oh, *mon Dieu!*" There was his maitre d' suddenly transformed into a P.E.N. president! Only in America!



Who is this man?

Carlos Castaneda. When the picture was taken, I didn't know who he was.

You seemed very friendly. Who did you think he was?

I thought he was a friendly Spanish bookseller named Don Juan—because when the picture was taken, someone asked me, “Have you ever seen Don Juan smiling?”

Did you refer to him as Don Juan—thinking he was a Spanish bookseller?

I must have! That's why he's laughing.



Who is this?

Svetlana Alliluyeva, then in America, writing. Svetlana is Stalin's only daughter. Remember the picture of Stalin, taken in 1938 (the Year of the Purges), holding her high in his arms? Now, looking at this picture, think of me as you remember me from the photo taken in Lodz face to face with her father in 1950. Me: an insignificant mole of her father's total empire; me: about to be squashed by a Stalinist party hack. Now look at us—at Svetlana and me, both in New York, both American citizens, both American writers. And as if all this isn't enough, both talking to each other in English, only in English.

Recently, Svetlana has returned to the Soviet Union. Would you ever think of going back to Poland?

Yes. Only in fiction. I've got a title for it already: *Boomerang*.

Three Poems by Heather McHugh

Gray Day

The wheel went round and left me
on a block of broken bottles,
spirits spent. So where
was the Los Angeles we dreamed of,
model for the others, with
its ideal tree (unmitigated lime,
pure pear)? Through swollen eyes I added
lots of blue to everywhere.

Beyond the tattoo parlor bloomed
a slough of hopes; I got myself
a permanent, I paid a man to shoot
two pearls into my ears (somewhere
an oyster's sore); but still the trees
were shade trees—eyeshade, dayshade,
green made gray by evening, and not
an orange or a plum in sight, no apple
in an eye. Now that it's midnight, maybe you
could send me just a shiver or an inkling
of a message, huh? I used to think the colors
added up to black—that's how alike
some opposites can be. You came
as easy as you went. And half the time the virgin's
deep in tears. And half the time the widow's
innocent.

This is the Life

His watch is wicked, going on
without him. Pass your hand
across the blue man's lips and
Q.E.D. We know we breathe
(and quite without our help) but then
we know we know, and so forget.
It's strange to be alive but we
have not felt awe since we were someone's
kid, and that was once
upon a time. In time we taught ourselves
to find the world mundane, and all
the unknown unsurprising, like
next Sunday, for example.
God himself gets bored, God knows.

*

On holidays we like to make
some sugar on a rope, some fallout
in the form of rocks,
the Science City someone gave
to Junior, Christmas Day. And you can etch
your name in the petri dish with pure
bacteria, or in the virgin snow with piss.
We draw the line at skin, for different,
at heart for dead; the EEG goes on all by itself. We used
to sing, and when we did, we sensed
the air itself was lively; then we fell
back into dream, we froze. And all night long
in the drawing room, after the household's asleep,
the crystal grows.

To the Quick

We fix the ages of the irises at flower,
stop the eons of the oranges at fruit.
For ripe is ready when we eat, and beautiful is full
by virtue of the ear-eye-nose-and-throat man.
Time is sometimes said
to be at hand.

But not for a second does the plant
stand still. The space of time we designate
as blooming, when did it begin? The beans turned
white to green, and green to brown, and then
were no less phaseolus; flesh

falls off into enormous gravity, and seeds
are an end in themselves, in a way.

On top of the TV set I put
the baby pictures, meant to keep
the little person as he was,

as still as he could be.

O man, o child,
we loved each other less
for how we moved than how we stayed.
And all the while the rivers we adore
have no address but vagaries of bed.

Two Poems by Donald Britton

In the Empire of the Air

Scourging the sea with rods
To punish it for what it has engulfed,
Or running naked with your bronzed friend
Through yellow broomsage:
You can't be sure which remedy will be
Fatal, or whether the density of the side effects
Will prevent you from moving backwards
Across the threshold, to read
What the instructions might have said
If anyone had taken time to write them down,
So we could torture the words, make them
Confess their dirty little secret. It's tiered,
As earth is, with faults perfectly expressing
A gravitational will that we should stumble
Over them. And all the hints
Get sponged up at night. Above the land fill—
Stars, glowing zircon strands of dump truck highbeams
Lined up, liquid and radiant, past the last
Open-all-night erotica boutique
Just over the state line of the last state.
Maybe they're sparks we ignite
Rubbing each other the wrong way, fiery notes
Unwary rhapsodists pluck from the strings
Of incendiary violins. Is that what you think, too?
In truth, I prefer your mistaken identity,
The upside down one I can see at the back of my eyes
Before they flip you into focus, projecting you
Across a space at once so vast and so small
As not to excite even scientific curiosity.
But the light you throw off, out there,
Is not enough to see you by. The tapered crimps

And ridges, scraped into the wall of the well,
Could be any number of people. Try
To communicate with the dying sometime
And you'll know what I mean. Each one is perfect,
Of its kind. Also, all are alike. Not even they
Can tell you, though, where the similarities end,
Whether it will be any different
For you. All I know is that what you are
To the waxed, limpid air of freak May in December
Or to this room, piled high
With genial household archetypes,
Is a formal relation only, as the shape
Of an airplane-shaped shrub is
To the living plant it's made of. But to me,
And all I said and did, and all the time
It took me to get here, so much I forgot
The purpose of my visit, but kept on anyway; to me,
As I hold you, and the messy edges
Of our privacy overlap and then withdraw—
Think of me as three persons, and as one,
But always who I am, ever changing
And complete, in the empire of the air
Or on the street, or with white sails
Stiff against the wind,
Whistling far out over the water.

Virgule

The arrow pointing three directions
Is a looser, more open form of display,
More like the subsidiary decor

A door divulges, opening upon
A continuum of hidden driveways,
Than the steep, reversible terraces

Of a zipper. Yet how often
Have I mounted a similar staircase,
Only to find myself, impatient,

On the floor below, pale
As a Pierrot on a cocktail napkin,
The level I was standing on

Now detached from the rest
Of the structure. So autumn
Exerts pressure on the fizzing,

Bright bulk of late summer,
Upends the light
To expose its corroded underbelly,

Next week and the week after
Arriving on time but ahead
Of our schedule: the ash

Of their once twice-shy contents
Sucked back into the hanging fire
That burns you at both ends.

Three Poems by Lydia Davis

What She Knew

People did not know what she knew, that she was not really a woman but a man, often a fat man, but more often, probably, an old man. The fact that she was an old man made it hard for her to be a young woman. It was hard for her to talk to a young man, for instance, though the young man was clearly interested in her. She had to ask herself, Why is this young man flirting with this old man?

The Dog Man

A man in our office is really a dog. He does not do well, is slow and clumsy though extremely good-natured. There is also a dog in our town who is really a man and is tormented by his inability to handle things and to express himself and thus cannot be good-natured but is sly and furtive and ashamed of himself. He is hated by everyone and kicked into the corner of the room. Of course that is only one kind of dog who is really a man: another kind of dog who is really a man is like the man who is really a dog in our office, and he does very well because he is really most comfortable as a dog.

The Fish

She stands over a fish, thinking about certain irrevocable mistakes she has made today. Now the fish has been cooked, and she is alone with it. The fish is for her—there is no one else in the house. But she has had a troubling day. How can she eat this fish, cooling on a slab of marble? And yet the fish, too, motionless as it is, and dismantled from its bones, and fleeced of its silver skin, has never been so completely alone as it is now: violated in a final manner and regarded with a weary eye by this woman who has made the latest mistake of her day and done this to it.

Three Poems by Jim Powell

It Was Fever That Made the World

It was fever that made the world
burn last summer, that afternoon
when I lay watching the sun pour
its incurable folly slantwise
into a plum tree's crest,
infusing it till the whole crown glowed
red as infected blood translucent
in a syringe. Sunlight was
the carnal fuel leaves burned for life —
obedient to hunger,
they turned their faces toward it with
such greed, in their recklessness
I could see fall's wreckage breeding:
motionless, each leaf swarmed
with an earthly fire
commanding as the power I felt
churning inside me last night
listening to a guitar rant
dirty blues till the crowd eddied
open as everyone
started dancing: past will
or withstanding, in the hot dark
song after song grew stronger, thriving
like summer in our shaken limbs.
Outside, between sets,

after midnight in the sidewalk
company of strangers, all
the flushed faces reminded me:
sweat was a fever sign last June—now,
my drenched shirt cooling felt

like health, like strength, urgent as the sight
of taillights queuing at the tollbooths
Friday night, then streaming up the bridge
till all five lanes of their sharp reds merge
toward the city's bright towers.

Revisiting the Haight

That year, sea-fog in tufted hanks
spun through the eucalyptus tops
below our attic flat,
thick coiling strands that looked as if
they passed right through the limbs—intact—
torn along the Panhandle toward the Bay
in the wet salt wind as though

mist and branches inhabited
worlds separate as that warm room was
from the winter weeks outside:
only damp darkening the leaves
at first, to show the two had touched,
and then the fogbank lowered, settling over
their slippery, peeling trunks.

Parchment scraps of their bark littered
the summer grass this afternoon
where I walked, looking up
five stories through those windows, trying
again to bring nearer to mind
two friends I lived with there twelve years ago,
and caught a glimpse, instead,

of a self I'd barely recognized
in our company of dwindled figures
rushing out of sight
as I saw that in twelve more years
torn along in the same wind
with every solid thing today housing my life,
that recognition, too,

will shrink and darken to another
almost unrecognizable story.
The shock was like the moment
when last month's earthquake had kept up
long enough to let me watch
the walls and wonder if they'd crack, break open,
fall—then longer, enough

to know myself helpless, freed
from fearing a titanic power
so far beyond my stature
it was without design. I think
that's what I wanted, last night
in your arms—to be caught up beyond design
and sheltered in that wind:

hidden, escaping, safely and well
lost to all but our limbs and glances
tangling till near dawn
—and instead, slowly discovering,
inside the moments our attentive
pleasures open into immensity,
my small self meeting yours.

Memory, Recognition

I was edging along a deer trail
past halfway into a thicket so dense
the tarweed stains never washed out
of my jeans, but I almost turned
and backed out when I smelt it
thickening through the head-high bristle
of sage, buckthorn and manzanita,
smothering their alert tangs.
I must have been fourteen, and I'd never
known that reek, but my body
knew it and answered—nausea
was a kind of foreknowledge.
It was worse on the other side,
inescapable as the heat: there,
near the shade at the withered
edge of the clearing I'd broken into
a dead calf slumped into the soil.
It had nothing to do with me:
back in the brush, I'd fallen behind
the hunt so I had to hurry
down canyon again—step quietly through
the brittle grass and keep watch
for bucks asleep under tan oak, black
oak, live oak. But it was so hot,
long before the arroyo
bottomed out I'd forgotten the hunt,
forgotten the ragged hide
—even the flies had left it—sagging
to show its emptied bones, and the brown
grass blackening with decay.

The jeep met us in creekside shade
near the mouth of the gorge, an ice
chest in the back. But soft drinks
weren't what I wanted, or even
to sneak a beer with my cousin:

that August the creek still ran
wrist-deep, cold over slate-blue stones,
slow enough for the sky and branches
to stain it, flecks of dark amber oak leaves
rusting unstirred on the bottom.

One night lying in bed years later
when you were five thousand miles away
I swear I saw your two eyes large
and wet in the light above me—so present
there that everything else

vanished as I was taken wholly
into blue-green flecked with amber
that was also a stream and shade
and my thirst slaked. For a long time now
I've wondered if that was the night

you tried three times to hang yourself—
furious at failing, at the cheap
French cotton cord that broke and broke.
But not till tonight did I recognize
the stream I thought I saw

in your hallucinated eyes,
or remember the hunt it ended,
or the dead calf. It's been six months
since we broke up. Memory,
recognition quench nothing.

Saturday, Sunday

Virginia Harabin

Weekends I serve fried chicken to drunks who make jokes about breasts and thighs. The manager comes out about once an hour and tells me to please put my cap back on. It's brown and orange, made of shiny thick knit, so I take it off again as soon as he's gone. There are bugs in the shake machine too. This little guy comes in, keeps mumbling about giving me a job, looking all foreign, dark-eyed and meaningful. But I wave him away because we get that all the time.

As things get worse I start believing him. He's a vet—the animal hospital is a few blocks away. I take my dog there when it needs shots for something.

What kind of job? I ask him. He says it's easy—you wash instruments, help with the treatments, just do what the doctor tells you.

I think about that for a while. Then one day leaning on the counter while he eats I say Hey, I'll take that job.

He shows me the hospital on Sunday after they've closed. I like going through those doors—STAFF ONLY. He shows me exam tables, wards full of animals, X-Ray, Surgery.

You'll be working mostly with me, I hope you like. . . Vasilios says. But I don't look at him. I look at the chrome, the bottles, hear the barking from the shelter next door. Yes, I'd like to work here.

I get hired for Sundays but he calls me Friday night to sub for the receptionist. Luckily I can type a little. I sit at the window, hunting and pecking.

Name?

Sparky, says the person holding a pup.

No, your name.

Oh.

The doctors have clinic hours—Vasilios and Dr. Kratz, the one I used to call the nice one, the one I hoped for when I brought my dog in. He's tall and tough. I can't type right when he stands behind me.

After eight the doors are locked. Vasilios says good night, looking sideways up at Dr. L. Kratz who asks if I'd like a tour of the hospital.

I say sure. None of it sunk in the first time.

L. Kratz isn't like Vasilios—he doesn't say it's easy. I look around, wondering if I can learn all this.

This gizmo, he says, is the X-ray machine, and here, holding the door, is where we develop.

We step inside and he flicks off the light. Trust me?

What am I supposed to do—scream, quiver, faint? I have no reason not to, I tell him.

Later he said that was the first thing that impressed him.

It shouldn't have, it wasn't even true.

Sunday morning I'm looking at the records to see who's in the cages. Everything is in code—HBC, frac 1 fet. Almost all the dogs are named Sheba. Vasilios comes down the hall, sings at me in Greek. Then he translates, roughly—Don't say anything, you don't need to say a word, your eyes say it all.

He gives me a white coat to put on, makes me sit in the office with him, says it's too early to work. I keep getting up, want

to start doing something, but he puts his feet on the desk.

Finally we start the treatments. He reads a name and a ward number, then I bring the animal and hold it on the table. He hands me pills, shows me how to stroke to get them to swallow. He takes my hand and runs it over a dog's hard throat.

Careful, he says, when I'm almost bitten.

Later someone brings in a Doberman that's been hit by a car. The dog lies on its side, eyes wide open, chest going up and down.

Shock, Vasilios tells me, pushing up its lip so I can see the white gums. We wheel it to the back, lower it into one of the big cages. Shouldn't we do something?

He shakes his head, it's going to die anyway, waste of time to bother with it.

All afternoon I keep going back to peer through the glass door of the ward, seeing the dog's head leaning on the bars. Finally I go in to check, kneel down. The dog is still. I open the cage gently to let the head slip slowly, put out my hand to ease it down. I know it won't bite, it's so hurt. But when I open the cage door the head stays stuck in the air, rigid. I run for Vasilios, but he just shrugs at me, says, See I told you.

The guy who mucks out cages helps me lift it onto the trolley. The dog's legs stick straight up, its head is raised as if looking at something. The guy tells me to follow him, and he pushes the cart out back.

It's hot and bright in the courtyard, smells like rot, like garbage. He opens the door to a huge metal box, a giant refrigerator. I see a heap of fur, dogs and cats all piled inside, packed together. I can hardly tell one from the other. There's a spoiled, meaty smell, and everywhere eyes, open eyes. He grabs the dog by the feet, swings it a few times for momentum, then tosses it up to the top. A shudder goes through the heap of bodies. I watch as he tries to close the door, leaning on it with his full weight. I hold my breath, pressing down hard.

The next week Harold, chief technician, comes in to train me. How'd you like that freezer, he smirks.

He's always ahead of Vasilios. Together we prep a dog for surgery. He talks fast—hold this, pull here, slide the tube in like this. He shows me the machines—oxygen this side, gas over here. I don't want him to think I'm stupid. I nod and try to do what he does. We tie the dog to the table, on its back, tube down its throat.

Where's Vasilios, Harold yells, banging through the surgery doors. I look at the dog. Its chest goes up and down.

At the end of the day Harold gives me a textbook. *A Manual for Veterinary Assistants*. Now I guess I'm trained—they say I can work Saturdays too.

Saturdays are busy—L. Kratz works then. He comes to the back where I'm washing instruments. Looks down at me, not saying anything. I scrub harder, then he says, I've got something for you.

I follow him to the laundry room. He gives me a pair of greens, a big loose tunic and big drawstring pants. He holds out his hand and I surrender the white coat.

I put the greens on in the bathroom, look at myself in the mirror. Then I wrap my service leash around my waist, twice. Better.

Why you wear this? Vasilios shrills at me when I come out.

I look at him, disgusted. It's what we're supposed to wear. He waves his hand at me, like he doesn't care about the rules. If he had his way I'd wear a bathing suit, ears, and a tail.

During the week I keep looking at that textbook, but the things they show are different from what I have to do. Harold's been to school—he knows doses, does stock, even minor surgery when L. Kratz isn't around. I keep the instruments clean, don't let them pile up. It's something.

It's hard to keep up with L. Kratz. He's always moving my hands, correcting me. He likes to do everything himself. He doesn't care if I understand. But I'm trying. I learn more every week.

Why did you choose me? I ask Vasilios, who by now is wondering why I'm not more grateful.

Because you are beautiful, he says.

L. Kratz starts working in the back with me more. Sometimes Harold comes in too. They watch my face as they bring in a pup clipped with sewing shears, cats with crushed legs, some with eyes knocked out. I keep my mouth shut, wait until they tell me what to do.

L. Kratz and I scrub up for bone surgery. You have to be strong to do this, he says. I hold the bone with sterile pliers while he puts in the pin. My arms want to shake but I hold myself rigid, stand that way for half an hour while he grunts and tugs.

While he's suturing the leg, he looks at me over his mask.

Do you like motorcycles? he asks, his eyes glinting.

I watched him ride in this morning. I thought it was one-way glass.

When she says no she means yes—that's on the radio in a song I like. But when I said yes I also meant no. The real truth is I don't have an answer. Just because he asked me, why does that mean I have to know?

We make it a habit, riding every week after work. Most of the time I keep my eyes closed, liking the forward motion, somebody else in control. The wind on my face.

One night we have dinner—he orders, thank God, and afterwards he says, What now, home?

I don't answer. He asks a lot of questions, a whole string of them. What's your favorite color, what foods do you like, one after the other. I answer most of them, thinking fast. I hardly know what to say. Why bother to have favorites? I take what I can get, that's what I should tell him.

What about your parents? he wants to know.

My mother works nights.

And your father?
Let's just go, I say.

Why do I love him? Because he has flared nostrils like a statue of a horse and a hard clean jaw, big hands, shoulders. Because when he kisses me in the darkroom, his arms go around me nearly twice. He can lift me and I like it, it makes his back hurt afterwards. He never laughs when something's funny—his eyes glint and his mouth, a long line, goes sideways, up at the corner. He burns me with his cheek at the end of the day. No, I'm not stupid. I know the difference between love and this.

A very sophisticated girl from school calls me on the phone sometimes. I'm eager to use the language I've read—*affair, married man, my boss*. Mostly it's inaccurate. Not an affair when it's just Friday nights, not my boss, though he is my superior.

What a great thing to tell your friends, she says.

Friday nights we go out, then Saturday it's business as usual. I try to be useful but a lot of the time I'm just standing by. He wrestles dogs by himself instead of letting me help. I guess it's supposed to be chivalrous. Sundays he's off and I'm with Vasilios again. He sniffs at me like a puppy. Suspicious.

The other woman here is Dr. Hutty, fat as a cloud, who writes vampire novels in her spare time. She tells Vasilios about the *Dark Shadows* conventions, about hotel rooms and naked vampire men. Then he tells me. Who would go with her? he says, she's crazy. But with me it's just dog and cat talk—she talks, I nod a lot. She asks about school sometimes, but I'm embarrassed because I told them all I'm in college. I just hope she doesn't know about L. Kratz, though once she said he doesn't respect women, and I said yes, I know.

And this place, this is the Lissa Flyte Memorial Hospital. It runs on the charity of ladies with a soft spot for strays. The board ladies, all Mrs. Something, come in their Sunday clothes—pink and blue suits, corsages, hats; they go around

to the puppy wards baby-talking the animals. Sometimes they cry over the unclaimed strays, the ones we put down in our spare time. Mascara running down their cheeks. When they leave the doctors laugh and do imitations with high squeaky voices. I smile along, kind of glad it's not me.

Sundays I'm dreamy, wish it were yesterday. I always want him here when he's not. One Sunday he shows up by surprise, bringing his two girls. They're friendly, come running back, want to see the animals. We go around to the cages. I tell them all the names and they ask to hold the kittens.

Then we hear L. calling. The girls giggle, grab my hands and pull me into the storeroom. Susan pushes the lock, and we hide behind the extra file cabinets. Light comes in through the window in the door. The girls press on me, snickering, so crafty. I don't know if I'm their hostage or their partner. We see L. through the window. He spots us immediately, tries the door.

He doesn't waste any time. He pulls out his big bunch of keys and unlocks it. A rectangle of light unrolls on the floor. He's in the center, a big shadow.

Susan, Julie, come out *now*.

The girls get up, we all step out into the light keeping our faces down. Without looking at us he goes through the door and the girls follow silently.

I duck into X-ray, flick on the light. The faint, lonely red light.

The kennel man brings a German shepherd. Froth around its jaws. There are no doctors around, the dog is drooping, so I get a big syringe, 15ccs of Pentabarb, and get right down on the floor. He's holding so tight. I take his hand off the dog's neck, put it down softly behind the ears. Just scratch.

The needle goes in and I aspirate, blood runs back. I depress the syringe and the shepherd goes limp. Then I notice the shoes behind me.

L. stands over me, looking down. He'd like to tell me I'm

not allowed, it's dangerous, but I've done it so well he can't. Lucky for me it was a dog. With cats you go for the heart and that's tricky.

He has another kid, by someone else, that he pays for in secret. Sometimes one of his ex-technicians calls him up. She sat on a kitten, was all frantic and crying, called to find out what to do. The kitten was dead, that's all he told me. I can't ask what he does, not when he goes home to his wife, more or less, six nights out of seven.

He was in love once, he even went to meet her parents, old as he was. But she moved away, to Colorado, I think. He wants me to be her.

He tells me that his oldest daughter is getting breasts. She's twelve, I'm seventeen. The difference equals five. I like the bitter sound of my voice. He turns his face away.

I'm scared sometimes, that's why.

Fear-biter huh? he says. That's what they call the little dogs, the ones who are supposed to be gentle at home.

I still can't say his name, at work I call him Doctor. Sometimes even in bed I call him that. To tease him.

I do an X-ray, guessing at the measurements. It comes out wrong and I do it again. Three times until I get a picture that works. I wonder how much radiation I'm getting. No one has given me a badge.

Every week we go to a different motel. One night he takes me to the one near the mall. I always noticed it when I was little, driving past with my parents. I wanted to stay here so badly—it had a pool out front.

It's cold now, the pool is a small cement pit. The motel is called Budget, so they must have changed the name.

He takes his shaving kit into the bathroom. I lie down on the bed. Friday night, five days of school over. I'm tired, and

I hate looking at the room, the twin double beds, the ugly blond dresser.

I open my eyes suddenly. L. is beside me, watching my face as I sleep.

Sorry. I *smile up at him. He doesn't smile back. I start to open my blouse, but my eyes close again. I wish he would shake me, pour water on my face, but he lies there patiently, like a father.*

Sunday afternoon I mix up a bucket of feed, using more cans than I'm supposed to but I can't give them plain dry meal. I go around to each cage, patting, soothing. Tails thump slowly on the newspaper. I talk quietly to them, hold the dish for the ones who can't get up.

L.'s kids come running back to find me. They want to feed the pups. I give them the scoop, they take turns filling the plastic bowls. They scoop out way too much, but I let them do it their way. Then we hear him yelling for them. They jump, look at each other, about to run.

I want to comfort, they're so happy by themselves. And they both look so much like him.

He scares me sometimes, I tell them.

Susan whispers, Us too.

But he loves you, I think at them. They run through the door toward the sound of his voice.

For two weeks in a row I call him up on Friday afternoon. I can't, I say into the receiver. The words travel slowly over the wires. When they get to him, he says, That's a disappointment.

Saturday I waver a bit, watching his hands hold a pup on the steel surface. The puppy trembles, and a puddle grows beneath its belly.

Would you take care of that, he says.

I think of him all bunched up in his compact, trying to kiss my neck. Baby-talking to me, the burn marks he leaves on my legs because I'm too polite to complain.

I look at the yellow pool edging outward, while he waits for me to jump.

I'm shaking all over. I want to throw something heavy and loud, break glass. I whisper, low enough that he might not hear me.

Clean it up your own goddamn self.

Portfolio

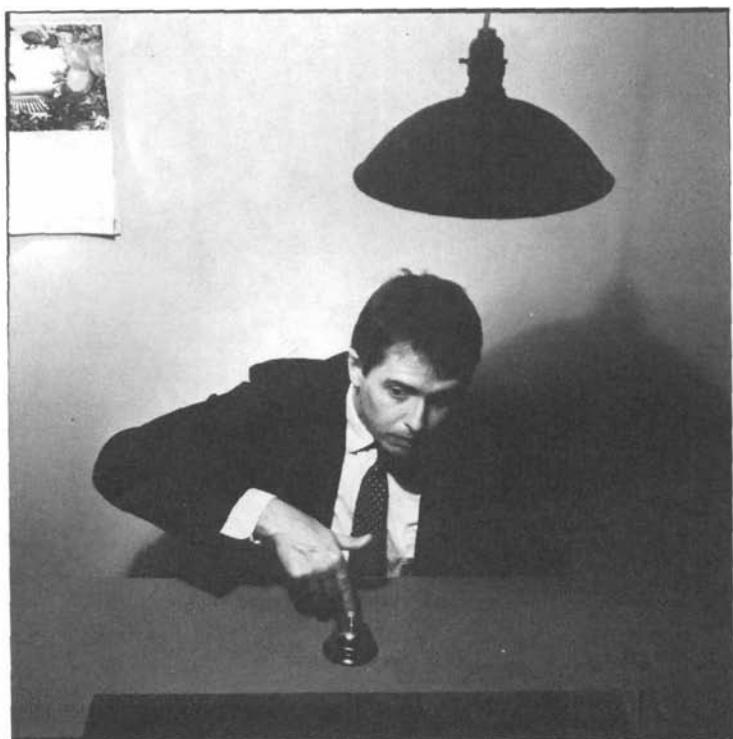
TROUBLE



Bruce Charlesworth











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J.D. McClatchy

At a Reading

Anthony Hecht's

And what if now I told you this, let's say,
By telephone. Would you imagine me
Talking to myself in an empty room,
Watching myself in the window talking,
My lips moving silently, birdlike,
On the glass, or because superimposed
On it, among the branches of the tree
Inside my head? As if what I had to say
To you were in these miniatures of the day,
When it is last night's shadow shadows
Have made bright.

Between us at the reading—
You up by that child's coffin of a podium,
The new poem, your "Transparent Man," to try,
And my seat halfway back in the dimmed house—
That couple conspicuous in the front row
You must have thought the worst audience:
He talked all the while you read, she hung
On *his* every word, not one of yours.
The others, rapt fan or narcolept,
Paid their own kind of attention, but not
Those two, calm in disregard, themselves
A commentary running from the point.
Into put-down? you must have wondered,
Your poem turned into an example, the example
Held up, if not to scorn, to a glaring
Spot of misunderstanding, some parody
Of the original idea, its clear-obscure
Of passageways and the mirrory reaches

Of beatitude where the dead select
 Their patience and love discloses itself
 Once and for all.

But you kept going.
 I saw you never once look down at them,
 As if by speaking *through* her you might
 Save the girl for yourself and lead her back
 To *your* poem, *your* words to lose herself in,
 Who sat there as if at a bedside, watching,
 In her shift of loud, clenched roses, her hands
 Balled under her chin, a heart in her throat
 And gone out in her gaze to the friend
 Beside her. How clearly she stood out
 Against everything going on in front of us.

It was then I realized that she was deaf
 And the bearded boy, a line behind you,
 Translating the poem for her into silence,
 Helping it out of its disguise of words,
 A story spilled expressionless from the lip
 Of his mimed exaggerations, like last words
 Unuttered but mouthed in the mind and formed
 By what, through the closed eyelid's archway,
 Has been newly seen, those words she saw
 And seeing heard—or not heard but let sink in,
 Into a darkness past anyone's telling,
 There between us.

What she next said,
 The bald childless woman in your fable,
 She said, head turned, out the window
 Of her hospital room to trees across the way,
 The leaforn beech and the sycamores
 That stood like enlargements of the vascular
 System of the brain, minds meditating on
 The hill, the weather, the storm of leukemia
 In the woman's bloodstream, the whole lot
 Of it "a riddle beyond the eye's solution,"
 These systems, anarchies, ends not our own.

The girl had turned her back to you by then,
Her eyes intent on the thickness of particulars,
The wintery emphasis of that woman's dying,
Like facing a glass-bright, amplified stage,
Too painful not to follow back to a source
In the self. And like the girl, I found myself
Looking at the boy, your voice suddenly
Thrown into him, as he echoed the woman's
Final rendering, a voice that drove upward
Onto the lampblack twigs just beyond her view
To look back on her body there, on its page
Of monologue. The words, as they came—
Came from you, from the woman, from the voice
In the trees—were his then, the poem come
From someone else's lips, as it can.

Jonathan Galassi

The Look of Things

for Katha Pollitt

1.

It isn't worth our while to fret about
our excellence or impotence in art.
I would have liked to be wilder, bolder,
someone who had tampered with tradition,
more personal or more impersonal.
I could have used a better body, too,
and a more classic profile,
but then I would have been another person
and written other poems, if I'd written.
For our real poems are already in us
and all we can do is dig.
We can work for years and never find them
or miss them when they stare us in the face.
At the worst, which is our common fate,
we turn up rubble:
bits of dirty mirror, shadowy glass
that tells us nothing. Its market value
is absolutely nil.
We can keep on digging, and we will.
But we were trained enough to recognize
that the jar is flawed, cracked in the firing,
and when we started to fool with it it shattered
into infinite slivers no one can put together,
each of which gives off the same small light.

2.

But you say art's extrapolation from
the jagged markings on these bits of clay;

we can invent them into undulant
 lines on perfect jars mysterious
 women brought to aromatic wells.
 I thought the nineteenth century taught
 the past we fabricate is parodied,
 Alma-Tadema or at best David.
 Look at the eye of this Egyptian boy
 some unknown Roman set in paint:
 something unimagined: history,
 not seamless or idealized: a face.

What strikes us in the image is the damage.
 This was a wound no hex could heal.
 Flies danced around it on warm days,
 no amount of incense hid its stench.
 And as for what it saw—
 sewers, beggars, sheepshit in the muck,
 tainted water, starving children, sores,
 women dead in childbirth, other women
 hauling water for the fire at home. . . .
 This was the world those jars were modeled in
 (how different is it, really, from our own?)

Who wouldn't have his youth back if he could,
 not to live it better but relive it,
 those exquisite mistakes, just one more time?
 Your poems say you would, although you claim
 that art is office archeology.
 Yet somehow I read something else
 in your beads and bits of glass:
 imperfection, rage, remorse,
 innate late twentieth-century loss.
 You know your only archive is your life,
 your past; its embers glimmer in your lines,
 which may, if we are lucky and survive,
 become a piece of this time's evidence,
 when our quaint habits, primitive machines,

outlandish clothes and more outlandish notions
furnish the future's sense of the pristine.

Katha, the wine that you and I
keep on professing we want to drink
won't tolerate pure vessels; it corrodes.
Its fire is modern and it goes by names
unheard of in the purlieus of the shardsmen.
Forget the palmy gardens of the brain,
their bright-tiled non-existent walls,
those women and their plangent chant
that you say underlie the look of things.
Our province is the plain:
its now and endlessness, heat and occasional rain,
and, from a slow rise, the long view
over scrub pine and factories
toward something faintly made out on clear days:
maybe mountains, maybe haze.

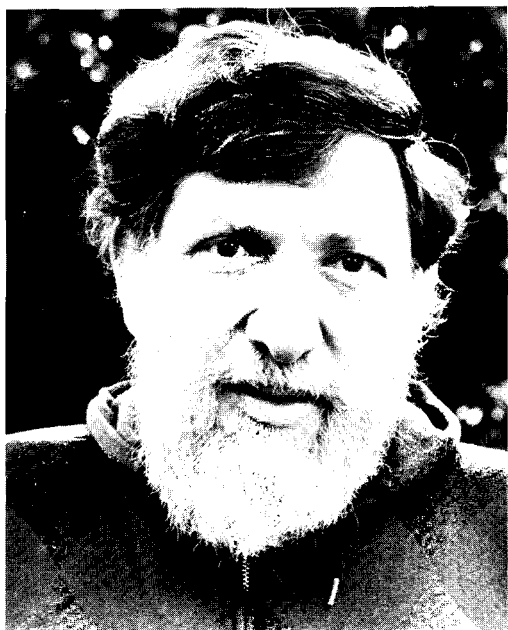
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The climb: one goes up and up in a winding way
Toward the peak, consuming resources whose used-up
Soup-cans would have become ballast in a moment.

This long way, whose very way of being a way
One has known so well that even its special
Surprises are no longer surprising—its course
Is less apparent to the heart than a detailed
Account of it might be, thus making the account
Somehow pointless. Ah well—at the top at last, one
Had dropped the final burden of wanting to have
Been up there at all: it drops silently, faster
Than gravity could draw it, straight down the sheer peak
Into the low shadows from which one started out.

Mr. 1877
Toward the peak, consuming resources one had brought
Along, whose used-up cans themselves become ballast
At those heights even one's breath gets heavier
at which

A John Hollander manuscript page.



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The Art of Poetry XXXV John Hollander

John Hollander is one of our most resourceful and prolific men of letters. Over the past twenty-five years he has published more than a dozen books of poetry. The first of them, A Crackling of Thorns, was chosen by W. H. Auden in 1958 for the Yale Series of Younger Poets; the most important of them is Spectral Emanations: New and Selected Poems, published in 1978; and the most recent — it coincides with his winning the Bollingen Prize — is Powers of Thirteen, which appeared in 1983. He has also written three books of literary criticism and three books for children, edited several antholo-

gies and textbooks, is the author of articles about artists from Thomas Cole to Saul Steinberg, and has devised libretti set to music by Milton Babbitt, George Perle, and Hugo Weisgall. All along, he has been active as scholar, teacher, and lecturer, first as a member of the Society of Fellows at Harvard from 1954 until 1957, later at Connecticut College, Yale, and at Hunter College, where he taught for eleven years before returning to Yale in 1977 as Professor of English.

This interview was conducted in a brick neo-Georgian house in New Haven, on a handsome street just far enough away from the university for there to be large shade trees and comfortable distances between neighbors. (Since then Hollander has moved to the country and grown a beard.) At one end of his living room was a Steinway whose lid was stacked with music: the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, Scott Joplin rags. At the other end, a fireplace over whose mantel hung an oil sketch by John Martin for one of his Paradise Lost mezzotints: Raphael instructing Adam and Eve. Nearby, a brazed sheet bronze abstract relief from the early sixties by his second wife, the sculptor Natalie Charkow. Some of her recent work was around too: haunting stone carvings of reclining couples.

During most of our conversation we sat in this room, on either end of an overstuffed, slipcovered sofa, a tape recorder and a pitcher of iced tea between us. At one point, though, in order to verify a quotation, he hurried upstairs to his study. I followed after him, through the gallery his front hallway and stairwell had become, trimmed with drawings by John Flaxman, John Varley, and Sir George Beaumont, and by a cluster of anonymous seventeenth-century artists. The study itself was bare of pictures, bare of anything but a writer's paraphernalia. Hollander apologized for its clutter. The desk and his battered Olivetti manual were heaped high with letters, notes, drafts, journals, review copies, student papers. Nearest the typewriter were dictionaries, and Hebrew, Greek, and Latin texts. Close by, on shelves that ringed the room, were books on gardens, philosophy, music, art, and mythology. Open on his desk were copies of Emerson and Ruskin.

Hollander is a man whose body gives the impression of more height and bulk than it actually has. His face is dominated by its features, his hands dart as he speaks, and his head nods. It is not his appearance—though there is a slight resemblance—so much as his manner that suggests a latter-day Dr. Johnson. His forceful personality can be gruff or ingratiating or contentious. His memory is prodigious, his interests encyclopedic. He has a voracious appetite for every kind of knowledge in all its details, and an equally compulsive desire to share what he knows, at times with a disconcerting finality.

INTERVIEWER

The born poets always seem to have made themselves up, and that starts with the conviction that one *is* a poet. Does that tend to happen at a certain time in one's life?

JOHN HOLLANDER

It differs with different people in different generations. When I was in high school I only wanted to be a humorist and a journalist.

INTERVIEWER

Were you any good at being a humorist?

HOLLANDER

Yes, I think I was. I wrote the humor column for the school newspaper, *The Science Survey*, at the Bronx High School of Science. I didn't start out wanting to be a poet, or writing poetry. All poets start out by imitating other writers, but the first writer I wanted to copy exactly was S. J. Perelman, and after him James Thurber. Someone should write a little essay on the importance of Perelman not only to comic but also to very serious writers.

INTERVIEWER

Was it his wordplay that attracted you?

HOLLANDER

It was that, it was the fact that he himself had really come out of the "Circe" chapter of *Ulysses*. It's quite true. He had confessed this on more than one occasion. You might observe that his comic routines were pretty much from that episode, in which an idiom suddenly becomes literal: "She sent him groveling. He came back with a basket of fresh-picked grovels." I loved that, and wanted to do that. By the time I got to college at Columbia, I still wanted to be a journalist, and I went out for the newspaper and shared the top number of column-inches of news and features material for a freshman that year. And then I got distracted.

INTERVIEWER

Distracted by poetry?

HOLLANDER

That's right. Oh, I'd always written verse, just to learn about the various forms. And I was translating some poems of Baudelaire as an act of literary piety. And then I started writing poems of my own.

INTERVIEWER

A freshman in college, then. And, let's see, sixteen at the time? Did the idea of your being a humorist make the notion of your becoming a poet more acceptable to your friends? Or, what would *you* have thought of the decision?

HOLLANDER

Oh, I would have thought it pretentious and silly, and written it up in my column as a joke. I later learned that when Auden was an undergraduate he felt that if one was a poet then one's outward personality ought not be "poetic." In a sense, when I started writing poetry I insisted on this too.

INTERVIEWER

Allen Ginsberg was a close friend of yours at Columbia in the late forties. How did he influence you?

HOLLANDER

Ginsberg was my poetic mentor, very generous and considerate of my early work. At college he was my close *poetic*, rather than literary, friend. That is, we talked about the minute particulars of form as if mythological weight depended upon them; and about the realms of the imagination. Not about style, or about “the artist in society”—those were literary matters.

INTERVIEWER

What was the undergraduate literary life at Columbia like in those days?

HOLLANDER

Most of my classmates at Columbia then were veterans several years older than myself, and they educated me as much as my teachers. Louis Simpson, Daniel Hoffman, Allen Ginsberg, all somewhat older than I was, were all writing poems of what seemed to be vast sophistication; and in 1949 I met Richard Howard, whose talent and literary energies seemed prodigious. Of the faculty, Mark Van Doren was a crucial presence for those of us writing verse, a presence itself fabulous to the degree that precept and example were interwoven in it. Also Lionel Trilling, Jacques Barzun, Moses Hadas, Meyer Schapiro, the legendary Andrew Chiappe—these were some of the teachers who mattered most to the minority of undergraduates in those days of a literary inclination.

INTERVIEWER

Was there a formal literary society?

HOLLANDER

Not really. *The Columbia Review*, with its tiny office in John Jay Hall, was something of a center. Many of the generally literary, rather than specifically poetic, undergraduates who were published there—Joseph Kraft, Norman Podhoretz, Robert Gottlieb, Jason Epstein, Byron Dobell—ended up in journalism or publishing. But it was Ginsberg who was my guide through literary modernisms—French symbolist poetry, surrealism, the world of the *poète maudit* generally.

INTERVIEWER

He was really one of your teachers, then?

HOLLANDER

For a time, yes, as a somewhat older and widely-traveled friend can be. And all the while, too, there were my teachers-at-a-distance, so to speak, the voices of instruction that came to me from the rustling leaves of books.

INTERVIEWER

Such as?

HOLLANDER

Well, in high school, Shaw's plays and prefaces; then, Mann's novels, and all of Auden I could find, and a good bit of George Orwell. These were my moral and political tutors, as it were, my teachers of irony and complexity, the authors which so many of my students in 1968 or so hadn't read. But I think that the great Columbia College "Humanities A" course—from Plato through (in those days) Goethe—was a crucial matter for all of us. Having been shown there *were* truly great books, we could begin to wonder what they could continue to mean. I suppose I needed the modern texts, and teachers, to learn how to learn from the ancient ones. I mean that at the time, I couldn't know how great *poems* could teach you anything about how to live. Novels, yes: in college I was learning that Dostoyevsky, James, Proust, George Eliot—as well as novelists as different as Jane Austen and Laclos—were major texts for secular moral instruction. We used to think that, at any rate, if you'd read enough French novels, you had no right to whimper, in the middle of some erotic, social and spiritual catastrophe you'd prepared for yourself, "*How could this happen to me?*" Of course, learning how to avoid catastrophe is always another matter.

INTERVIEWER

It can't be coincidental that all the teachers you name are moralists. You say that Auden "changed" you. What was it in his work exactly that fired you?

HOLLANDER

It was the relation between seriousness and play. It was the voice of a kindly intelligent grown-up who never forgot what it was like to be a child. It was the wonderful improvisational relation to stances and forms and literary modes. The idea of a poet who could *write at* anything and have it all be part of the poetic oeuvre. A poet who could at once contain and indulge that basic impulse to play with words—an impulse I'd always had and which, at first, I'd only found an outlet for in joking.

INTERVIEWER

I gather you never took a course in poetry writing. But you teach creative writing workshops yourself now, don't you?

HOLLANDER

Not workshops. When I decided to become a university teacher and go to graduate school, I wanted to write scholarly criticism and to teach the literature of the Renaissance. I wanted to keep my poetry a separate matter. During the rise of the "creative writing" industry, in the 1960s, I never taught those courses, nor was I a "writer in residence" anywhere. When I returned to Yale in 1977, I agreed to teach some courses in verse composition, in which I construct and set exercises in formal and rhetorical structures and, like my great predecessor in this course at Yale, Robert Penn Warren, I read great poems with the students who want to write. You can teach the *writing* of verse—like prose, an instrument—and the *recognition* of true poetry. The rest, writers must teach themselves. Before there were any creative writing courses, people set their own exercises. Look at Keats' or Blake's juvenilia, for example—exercises in verse forms, in order to discover their own private relationships with form, scheme and mythology. Now that self-help has been discouraged by the culture as a whole, I try to teach writers how to teach themselves. But not workshops—wasn't it Kingsley Amis who said that most of the terrible things that had happened to the world since 1945 had come out of a workshop?

INTERVIEWER

What can a teacher actually do to help one learn to be a poet?

HOLLANDER

What a teacher can do is point out to you that things you're doing when you read or listen or think about language, even though they may seem very weird to you and you may suppress them, are *not* mistakes, are the right thing to be doing. I discover now that a lot of things I did with language and even visual things in childhood, and that I was ashamed of because grown-ups didn't do them, were a sort of primitive art.

INTERVIEWER

For example?

HOLLANDER

The delight I took, for example, in Central Park's Shakespeare Gardens, that were planted with all the herbs mentioned in the plays. I used to wander through that, and it was the first sense I'd ever had of a complicated garden design, and I used to love to walk through it, along twisting paths, and come out on a little bridge across a tiny stream, then walk back into foliage and cross the stream again by another bridge and look at the first bridge I'd crossed. The scale of this was very small, but I loved its *connections*. I knew I could never talk about this to a grown-up, who would think it ridiculous. It was only much later, when I was bowed under the weight of learning, that I realized the European nobility from the fifteenth through the late eighteenth centuries had spent vast amounts of money in order to build for their delight those structures of variegated, differentiated internal and external space—something in my enlightened education I'd been taught to neglect. My parents used the word "modern," when referring to art and architecture, as a caressing term. In those days one *had* to admire clean, modern lines, no Victorian gingerbread.

INTERVIEWER

A good teacher would have been able to relax those strictures.

HOLLANDER

Precisely. Good teachers in fact did that, by reminding one that the mistakes one made in childhood — the idea, say, that one thought things were alike because the words that named them rhymed — are part of doing something right, not something wrong. One of my teachers at Columbia, the classicist Moses Hadas, aware that it would get back to me, said that I oscillated when I was seventeen between being seven and seventy. And he didn't say that in disapproval at all. Or, here's another instance: another of my teachers, Mark Van Doren, simply reading a poem of mine, would pick out one word that I had thought was a passing move, and he'd say *that* was the poem's marvel — and not tell me why. I'd have to go home and think about it. In trying to do the hard thing, something else just came along. Now why should somebody want to say that was the best thing, as if the hard thing I had set out to accomplish were nothing? Oh, that was a very valuable lesson. Later, I learned that was one of the standard stories about great teachers, and I hadn't had to go to a Zen master to learn it. What you have to learn is what indeed you can do well.

INTERVIEWER

Now that you're a teacher yourself, is your schedule as a poet pretty much determined by your academic life?

HOLLANDER

Not necessarily. Often when I'm most busy with teaching or scholarly writing, my notebook will start filling up, or I'll begin to see just exactly what plant a particular notebook seed was really of. Sometimes a long sequence, like *Reflections on Espionage* or *Powers of Thirteen*, is easier to maintain in and among other tasks. In progress, a long project is like a secret houseguest, hidden in your study, waiting to be fed and visited.

INTERVIEWER

Do poems come more easily to you now than they did twenty-five years ago?

HOLLANDER

Yes and no. I hope that bad ones don't come at all. That is, I don't try to play with particular structures, ideas of what a poem is, formats and the like, just to see what I could do with them. Those things were "easy" to write in many ways. I like to apply Karl Kraus's remark on aphorisms to poems: they're all easy to write if you don't know how.

INTERVIEWER

How long do you work on a poem?

HOLLANDER

A short one will be written quickly, at one sitting, usually under an hour. A really long one may take over two years.

INTERVIEWER

How do you sense that you've "finished" something?

HOLLANDER

I usually seem to finish a poem when I write it down. That's because I may have been carrying the notion of it around so long in my head.

INTERVIEWER

Even the last line?

HOLLANDER

No, I discover that — unless I'm writing the sort of poem that is generated by its last line.

INTERVIEWER

So you don't revise very much at all?

HOLLANDER

I revise very little. I always write in longhand, and I revise when I type. Then, when a poem is to be published in book-form, I may redo something in its magazine version, something that doesn't seem right to me. I test those aloud by reading

them in public. When I read a poem I can very often tell if something is wrong, sounds phony or forced, isn't doing what it's supposed to be doing. I hear a wrong relation between the rhythm and the sense, say. I sometimes hear a weak or easy move, or some inadvertent chiming of sounds that I didn't want. That's one of the many reasons I love to read.

INTERVIEWER

What of your sense of your own voice? How has it changed?

HOLLANDER

It's changed. In a general sense, I was writing in a line of wit, and of essayistic speculation, when I was young. Still under Auden's influence, I wanted to be read by philosophers and scientists and political theorists, not just by literary readers. But then I began to write less discursively, more puzzlingly, I suppose less wittily — except in what was clearly versified essay, like my poem in couplets called "New York." Someone recently accused my view of poetry as being "High Romantic," and if that means agreeing with Shelley that poems are far more than good writing in verse, I suppose it's true — a strange version of the High Romantic, anyway, and at a late hour. My voice is still the same, but it doesn't expound in verse nowadays — it rather murmurs or chants or sometimes mutters, meditatively and privately.

INTERVIEWER

How did you — or rather, how does any poet come to make that sort of change? Are those changes made for you?

HOLLANDER

There are two ways in which modern poems seem to live in their metrical forms. One of them's exemplified by Stevens, who found very early on that it would be a kind of blank verse, and finally, blank tercets, that he was going to be able to write in. He found a style of blank verse that was completely his own and he could even, as we know, dictate poems in it. Then there is the Audenesque kind of approach to verse, which wants to

use every conceivable device or form or style, attaching some kind of modal significance to each one. "The Sea and the Mirror" itself is a perfect example of this, where every character at one point speaks in a different verse form and exemplifies it—that poem seems to sum up his whole formal career. These are two diverging traditions, and for a long time I've felt myself to be part of the second, the Audenesque, and doomed to hanker after the inevitability of certain kinds of form. Some poets I admire very much found a way of speaking early on, and they had no *general* formal problems thereafter. Technical problems were of other sorts. Other writers of course have wandered from one thing to another. Right now, I speak in pure syllabics, but I don't know what will come next. I find free verse very, very difficult to write; in the past, when I've written free verse, I've felt the constraints some people must feel trying to write couplets. I don't know why some people have an ideology about form—"open," "closed," whatever.

INTERVIEWER

We've talked about poets and teachers. How do poems themselves teach?

HOLLANDER

They teach not how to live, but how to learn about living. Great poems are all fables about life. There are two popular and radically antagonistic views in the world today about what the best literature does. One is that literature is only about itself. The other view is that literature is all about life, and that the more directly it transcribes experience the better it is. These are two views I find equally implausible. I think one of the things about poetry (and certain great fiction would be included in this) is that the whole notion of "aboutness" is peculiar. One of the ways literature is about life is by way of being about itself. Or, to put it better, literature gets to be about life genuinely by taking very great regard of how much it is about itself. Its business is, in Stevens's phrase, "plainly to propound" fictions,

the way one propounds parables, and to go on interpreting. That is its higher moralism.

INTERVIEWER

The artist Saul Steinberg once said that, for him, drawing is a way of thinking on paper. Is poetry a way of thinking for you?

HOLLANDER

Yes, certainly. I've discovered too that poetic thought shares something with teaching in this respect. Poetic thinking can be characterized in many ways—as alogical or symbolic (whatever that means) or visionary or whatever. Those are the terms of various schools. Ultimately, poetic thought is interpretive.

INTERVIEWER

I read the other day that when Thomas Carlyle visited Coleridge he found that the poet “could not keep from his laudanum bottle” and that there were “a number of ingenious flashes and pleasant illustrations in his discourse, but it led nowhere.” That description reminded me of a lot of contemporary poetry. What would happen if you took laudanum?

HOLLANDER

Nothing. It would have absolutely nothing to do with the imagination—as I learned when I was young and went in for that a little more. Let's put it this way: I don't take laudanum. I take pains. Actually, what summons up vision and voice from wherever they ordinarily hide is the dangerous charm, the potent magic of language itself. Language and its structures—the alchemy of syntax, the temples and sacred precincts of verse. Solving puzzles of construction that I've propounded for myself. Discovering secret doorways and hidden surprising staircases in formal rooms that had been lived in for centuries. Those are what lead to unfoldings for me. I guess that's the poetic dope I—er—*do*.

INTERVIEWER

Let's talk more specifically. What's the genesis of a poem? What comes first to you?

HOLLANDER

A true answer to that question would really be like another poem! All of the candidates we have for being atoms of the poem are interpretive notions. It's hard to say. A poem starts from a prior sense of what a poem is for me at the moment. What sort of piece of writing does one think of as a poem? There are so many possibilities in this century. Anything that purports to be a poem has *some* claim. I know the sort of text I think of now as a poem, and that's my starting point. Then, I have a sense of the sort of terrain I want to explore next. Very often there is a series of moves I want to make, and the poems group themselves.

INTERVIEWER

For example?

HOLLANDER

Well, my recent long poem *Powers of Thirteen* was—like so many poems—an original intention that got out of hand, took hold of its own reins and ran away with itself. And me. I'd started writing a poem about—I should say "about" in quotes—plainness and complexity. It got to be eight stanzas of thirteen lines, each of thirteen syllables. When it was finished, I noticed something sonnetlike about the stanza form. Even though unrhymed and not accentual-syllabic, it was a block of verse utterance with possible divisions into six and seven, eight and five lines or whatever. I then wrote some individual ones, exploring the ways of talking to myself the form suggested, quickly learning to call "You" whatever it was "in" me I was talking to. Then "You" began to come alive, through the breath of my talking. And then a discursive project was thrust upon me. I hadn't set out to write a very long poem. That decision was a sort of interpretation of what I'd been doing in the first place. But then I knew I'd have to work through the meaning of "You"

in my life, and not wanting it to be an endless work, I decided that there could be no more than 169 (or thirteen squared) of these stanzalike, sonnetlike blocks.

INTERVIEWER

But what about writing any one of them?

HOLLANDER

I kept a notebook—an ancient Harvard Coop ledger with numbered pages I'd had for decades. The thirteeners got written in it, on pages that usually had a note or two . . . a phrase, a turn I wanted my walks with "You" to take, in town or in the country. A feeling. A fear. A connection between two disparate elements of experience, or a conspiracy I'd discovered between two words.

INTERVIEWER

In other words, not notes for subjects of poems.

HOLLANDER

No, although they ended up on the periphery of sex or work or art or the human seasons. I'd write the poem on the page, working in and around the germ of notebook entry. Often the poem would outgrow its conception, and the entry would vanish, or change, or sometimes get recopied onto a later blank page. Some sections stayed partly written for months. Some would be calendrical—I'd be able to ask, "Well, what have I to say to 'You' about Labor Day?" A lot of these were poems of summer, and I suppose that northern Maine claims much of the landscape in them.

INTERVIEWER

But what about other poems of yours, not in series?

HOLLANDER

I suppose that there is always some implicit sequence, some relation to some kind of thing one has been doing. A new separate poem may be, imaginatively, turning over a new leaf. But

that presupposes a book full of old ones. So that the “occasion” of every poem—which is always a junction of many paths, reflective, formal, questing, exploring—is also the occasion of filling a place in a series of what one has done. Of the tradition of one’s work.

INTERVIEWER

You seem to make most of your decisions about a poem, then, *before* you write it. But in the writing of it, does a poem have new energies that take you by surprise?

HOLLANDER

Of course. That’s the whole point, isn’t it? Inspiration comes within a framework. A poem that doesn’t get out of hand isn’t a poem.

INTERVIEWER

Would you distrust the poet who works without such a framework or scaffolding? Or might you even envy him?

HOLLANDER

I don’t think anybody works without scaffoldings, but different writers are conscious in different ways of how they’re building them. A writer who *appears* not to have one is perhaps to be envied. There’s nothing to recommend in this matter. Each poet evolves individually. Each scaffold is protected by the poet’s blindness about it. It isn’t that writers are evasive. Oh, writers are entitled to *some* evasion because people ask us questions that are merely curious, not serious. But all writing is a little like magic, and you’re really afraid that if you could rationalize it all, give a perfect account of it, it would somehow wither away. No matter how much you believe—as I do—in rational discourse and clarity and good models, I think there is always that fear. I wouldn’t have wanted to say so twenty years ago, but there you are.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think you’ve limited your audience by the kinds of

presumptions you have about the way a poem is written and how it is to be read?

HOLLANDER

No, what's "limited" my audience is its difficulty in coping with how much I may have on my mind at a particular moment.

INTERVIEWER

You mean that you're not elusive so much as too allusive.

HOLLANDER

Not all poets, certainly, but all poetry is ultimately very allusive. Literature is not different from life, it is *part* of life. And for someone like myself, *The Odyssey* is as much a part of nature as the Aegean. And I react to the Aegean—as distinct, say, from the Caribbean—because its history is part of its physical substance. What I *know* about it, and *feel* about it, even mistaken things, is a part of it. Certain great texts are like this. *Paradise Lost* is like the Himalayas. It's *there*. A part of nature, not separate.

INTERVIEWER

You are increasingly referred to by your best critics as a Jewish-American poet. We're used to debating issues about "Jewish" novels and novelists, but it's an aspect of poetry that's rarely discussed. How is it defined? As a style? A sensibility?

HOLLANDER

The problem is perhaps something deeper than that. By and large, myth-making, or image-making, and traditional Judaism are antithetical. It's as if you had to be somehow violating something to make images and symbols at all. On the other hand, verbal images—verbal substitutes for images—and stories told in interpretation of other stories, are both a part of Judaistic tradition. I do not have unpleasant memories of my Jewish childhood. My family was somewhat observant—that is, I grew up in a kosher household, and I was taught some Hebrew, and my parents, both of whom were enlightened freethinkers in

some senses, made some deliberate commitment to maintaining traditions of observance because they believed in so doing. And remember, I grew up during the Hitler period and during World War II, when it became important for all sorts of other reasons to affirm these things. When I got to college, I drifted completely away from religious observances, not rejecting it, but simply ignoring it. Then again, because I had some kind of poetic vocation, it meant I had to enter into an intense, long love affair with the English language and its history, with the American language and its relation to the English language, which meant the poetry both in them and shaping them. The English language is the language created by an Anglo-Norman alliance, forged by Christianity. There *is* a way in which English is a Christian language. A kind of exploration of it was necessary. It seemed impossible for me to ruin poetry willfully by just taking “Jewish material” and putting it into poems. I could never do that. And I was not ready to write of my own life for a very long time. I could only write fables and jokes and fictions, in the narrower sense, about my own life, and write through personae that were largely not Hebraic. They were recapitulations and summings up of all of the relations to masks that modernism had put upon me. I was not making much contact with many earlier traditions—that is, I think I still believed, in my early twenties, Donne to be a greater poet than Milton. This was nonsense, but it’s what I’d been taught to believe. I hadn’t shaken that off yet. I hadn’t read Spenser at all, just a few bits, the obligatory bits, and hadn’t understood what Spenser being “the poet’s poet” meant—that is, the poet that other poets could comprehend when other people couldn’t. This relation to poetry was really a little bit like my relation to my own peculiar anomalous condition. I did always feel that anomalousness, the anomalousness of being Jewish, in history, and how being Jewish-American was a different kind of hyphenation from other kinds . . .

INTERVIEWER

Not anomalous in New York.

HOLLANDER

No, but anomalous in America. I knew that New York was a Jewish enclave in America, and also I knew that New York wasn't America because of its cosmopolitanism anyway. I did cross the country when I was seventeen; I had some sense of American expanse. In any case, I didn't really know what to make of the problem of poetic identity. I certainly wasn't interested in pretending not to be Jewish, just as, in absorbing French poetry and the English Metaphysicals, I wasn't pretending not to be a New Yorker. I certainly didn't want to do what a very touching, moving generation of immigrant writers had done, poets like Charles Reznikoff, who had seen in a kind of William Carlos Williams objectivism, as it were, a way in which a writer could write the common American language and not betray his Judaism—culturally at least. Religion was another matter; you can't substitute traditional Judaism for orthodox Christianity, with its rich patterns of ritual and fable, in a poetic world. It's almost as if there were a kind of allegory in this. But I won't interpret it now.

INTERVIEWER

Is there a contradiction, then, between a *Jewish* poet as transmitter and interpreter of a given tradition, and an *American* poet who is archetypically considered an originator, a seer rather than a scholar?

HOLLANDER

Well, this is one of the things I'm trying to understand. I do think that a lot of American Jewish poets really aren't that much in contact with Jewish tradition, that the history isn't available for them, or perhaps only a foreshortened one is. For some—and I'm not speaking in condemnation but speculatively—for some American Jewish poets, Jewish history either starts with the Holocaust or with nineteenth-century pogroms.

INTERVIEWER

Yes, but what line do you see in all this?

HOLLANDER

I don't.

INTERVIEWER

You don't see yourself as the heir to Charles Reznikoff and Delmore Schwartz so much as to Wallace Stevens and Emerson.

HOLLANDER

No, I don't. You see, poetically I don't feel close to Jewish predecessors. I feel there have been some twentieth-century Jewish poets I've admired very much for the ways in which the Jewish tradition and the contemporaneity can work together. But they're all radically different in the way they do this, it's all very strange. Paul Celan, for example. It's very remarkable what happens in his later poetry—Jewishness isn't in any way literal there. The poet who is in the best position to be able to deal with both Jewish and other literary tradition is Yehuda Amichai, because he is writing in Hebrew in Israel today. I think a lot of his poetic roots are German. The influence of Rilke both on Celan and, I suppose, on Amichai, is strong. But that isn't it. I suppose that the Jewish component of the poetry is simply the personal one. I hope my case is a version of that, as if Jewish history, in some metaphoric way, infused my childhood, my parents, my early years. That's the way I think so-called "Jewish experience" enters, rather than ideologically or schematically. You might say that it has the same kind of role in an approach to a general literary sense of America as regionalism does.

INTERVIEWER

You don't consider yourself part of a regional group?

HOLLANDER

I am a New Yorker, by birth and some disposition. I'm not part of a school. The contemporaries whom I admire most—their writing is totally different from mine, formally, in the realms of the mythology, everything else. I think the notion of school or community is very trivial indeed. Some people seem

to think that poetry is a kind of corporate enterprise. I think it's very lonely; that is, the work is very lonely. The politicized notion of people writing in chorus, which I suppose ultimately goes back to French painting in the nineteenth-century and the notion of "schools" and antiacademic academies, is either a public relations ploy on the part of editors, reviewers, or whomever, or a sincere but imaginatively trivial matter of people huddling together for warmth because they are cold. I think one needs one's own warmth. I can't ever be anything but a Jewish-American poet — and I suppose the way I am is simply the way anyone is a poet who manages to be one. What that means is always what it means to be an American poet: to help try to define the idea of being American. This is where I do feel that I, like all of us, trace back to Emerson, in that being American is a very special version of the condition of being a citizen of a country, that it is anomalous in the history of nationalisms. It is quite as anomalous in one sense as being a Jew is in the whole world of nations, races, religions, since trying to define being a Jew by any of those is very difficult, almost impossible. It's a tradition of identity which for some reason has continued. America, which has, of course, all of the physical and outward attributes of continuation, nevertheless was from the beginning a special case of being a nation. We still are, particularly in the world so changed now even from what it was twenty years ago. Being Americans, we have a special burden on us, a burden of invention of self, and I feel that these matters are somehow related, metaphorically. That is, being Jewish and being American are in a way parables for each other. But I say that with some hesitation. Perhaps those two conditions are like two lights burning together, lights of two different colors.

—J. D. McClatchy

David Lehman

Arbeit Macht Frei

“Work shall set you free:” a sensible sentiment:
Marx would agree: Freud would give his assent:
Yet take those words and put them on a sign
And hang that sign upon the gate at Auschwitz,
What happens then: it means “abandon hope all ye who
enter here:”
And that is exactly the relation between language and
truth,
Said the professor: yes, and if life is but a dream
Of paradise, it’s a nightmare with a happy ending:
Waking, we forget we were thieves of Eden in our sleep:
The others who slept in our room last night are gone,
But we go on, aping their gestures of resigned
Acceptance, knowing we shouldn’t envy
The heroes of the late nineteenth century
Whose crucial fictions can mean nothing to us today,
Yet envy them we do, while in the deserted classroom,
Obscured from view, the unerased blackboard awaits
The eraser monitor’s fresh wet sponge:
Quick, write down the formula, pretending that it’s true:
Don’t ask why: this is nervous bliss, this refusal to take
Pain to the piano with you, this quiet cry.

Three Poems from Morocco
by Elizabeth Vreeland

We fly above Kenitra
Circling so low
I almost smell the fig trees'
Heavy sun sick scent.
The houses,
Shaped by almost touching
Thumb and forefinger,
Lie scattered on the ground
Like doughnuts
With one bite gone.

Ladders

They say,
The worst job in the house
Is to carry the board of morning bread
To the baker's—
And bring it back for lunch.
Everywhere, something
Has to be the worst.

Stick to Your Own Kind

If you don't marry a girl
From your bled,
She won't know how to make the bread
Your way.
She won't know how to work the soap
Your way.
She won't know how to brew the tea
Your way.
Don't make the mistake I made.

Phillis Levin

The Lost Bee

"As a lost bee returning to the hive"—Allen Tate

When I returned to the hive I was one
Among many, in a blistering hum;
A braid of air had brought me far from home,
—Blinder than flowers, simpler than the sun,
Weaving through waves of incandescent curves
That offered what they always had to give.
Then why suddenly did the hive seem a grave,
The queen, in her mystery, an end to serve
Who before was my mother, my god;
What happened on the way, and how did I lose
Direction, season, aim—scanning the skies
Numbly for a current, a sequence, a strand.
They welcomed me back with a typical dance,
But its fantastic patterns made no sense;
And yet I know, now, a tempo that encodes
The temples and fields, the pulse of time and space.
I must have been exiled from habit
By a strange wind, a stray leaf, a migration
Constellating unheard-of combinations;
But they don't notice, they don't mention it.
Their honey is too sweet, the hive too dark,
The swarm of cells too tight; and no one to tell,
To fly with—for no substance of theirs can seal
The knowledge vaulting outside the matriarch.

In the flurry and buzz of business meetings
All that we hear is a forecast of trouble:
The comb's overcrowded, the queen's gold bubble
Polluted by pollen clouding her wings.

She's laid plans for starting a new colony
To restore our nectar's profit and destroy
The sting of death, decay, and anarchy.
Our empire's estate of wax and honey

Will thrive again, one day; and it is rumored
That I have been destined to attend
The queen on her odyssey—she trusts me,
Or perhaps she has grown sick of loyalty.

John Tarrant

Flute

Flute—a simple remedy
of which the herb is sound.

My eye is a planet with another motion,
with its orbits and burials;
each dawn I forget
where I came from.

The river, the hugging mist,
the shroud of the body unwrapped
at the beginning of the world
recently completed with already memories,
fossils, foreign advisors,
Radio Independence.

I joined the courtship of a bird;
he built a bower
and danced with a flower in his beak,
blue petals were the color of his satin feathers
and his beady eye.

I saw the amorphous monuments
and fungus gardens of the termites,
the polyps building their houses
with their bones.

I watched the anthropologist continue.
He studied the shanties, made of sticks
and corrugated iron,
tottering out into the bay.
I watched the starved dreams caught
like bats
in the people's hair.

I was secretary to the natural order of all things.
Animals approached me.
My companions died.

I watched the small ants bring them
into their holes.

Time's music ate me free of myself
and I live in a flute now,
in ecstasy.

Molly Russakoff

September 3, Philadelphia

At the failing of summer
just when autumn is breaking
the pavement with its strong back,
the city breathes and stretches,
the trolley cars whisper with rejuvenation
and all along Pine Street, the young lesbians walk
arm in arm, engaged in conversation.

One lone woman
in frills with a useless umbrella,
hurries along, as the sun is almost down.

And, all the while, in catholic homes
mothers are lengthening and shortening
plaid skirts, taking seams in and out.

A rosary hangs from the lamp
by which they're working
and all of their husbands
are promised raises in the fall.

"It is a hopeful time," says God.
"It is a time for new beginnings."

And by the moon, we begin to see
that all of the lesbians have an air
of just having come out.
Moths come shyly from the tucks in their clothing
and flutter off into the streetlights.
The lone woman reaches home
to find that everything she owns
is brand new.

"This time I will not let
the rattiness to it," she swears.

She perches herself on the edge of her couch
and bites into a maraschino cherry.

All of the children are upstairs
fighting quietly across the beds
to one another. "They're wild,"
the fathers say. The mothers answer
sweetly and knowingly,
"They're always wild
this time of year."

(Soon the fathers will look to the mothers
and ask where they got all their wildness from.
The mothers won't answer; just smile.
They will look very tempting to the men that way.)

Dana Gioia

Flying Over Clouds

No earthly image—only clouds,
affluent clouds, seen from high above,
still bright at the approach of evening.

Soft valleys hidden in a snowdrift,
waterfalls of ice and air,
not whiteness but a dream of whiteness,
an innocence one may have felt
on earth—but only for a moment,

waking unexpectedly at dawn
one winter morning after a storm
to find the shabby blacktopped streets
immaculate in sunlight, glossed
by deep smooth banks of snow, before
the earliest car or footfall.

So strange,
this world the ancients never saw,
and yet their words now come to mind,
nimbus, cirrus, cumuli,
magic names to summon all
the scattered elements of air.

O paradise beyond the glass,
beyond our touch, cast and recast,
shifting in wind. Delicate world
of air too thin to breathe, of cold
beyond endurance.

And nothingness
that mirrors our desire—not of death
but of your fluent oblivion,
of insubstantial dusk and dawn,
your whiteness burning in the sun.

The plane flies westward gaining time.
The dark recedes—and up ahead
the sky is cloudless, clear, and bright.

Two Poems by Hildegarde Flanner

Image on a Curving Surface Seen in Evening Traffic

What do I see? What do I wish to tell,
How haunting the shadow of a metal stair
Circling a tank is in the evening sun?
Why should this leave the breath taken
And the heart undone
With glow of an image rising in the mind,
The kind I love, one image holding another one?

Clairvoyant lines that easily are
Free of reason's frugal use,
This phantom without flaw
Has the ephemeral license to be real,
A black delight too soon to fade..
Sad perfection has not long to dote on
The imperilled art that it has made.

This is the hour when men drive home
And the loud trance of traffic sweeps
To one known door and one known kiss,
To meaning of door and kiss no deeper than before,
Yet wheels and fuels and hungers flow
All day to this,
When suddenly, as the sun slips low,
Someone from his motor leaning
Vehemently puts on his brake
As if a knife had grazed his knee,
And in the anger of the horns he whispers,
 "Exquisite and fugitive,
 What did I see?"

Concerto No. 2 in A Flat Major

John Field (1782 Ireland—1837 Moscow)

In the poor doldrums of the day
The shuffling sails hung empty until John Field
Blew music toward them, and suddenly
They glided upon the ides of night
And where he cast his anchors down the moon
Could still look at the sun,
And I at once fell into the arms
Of my old love. There we thrived
In listening and delight.

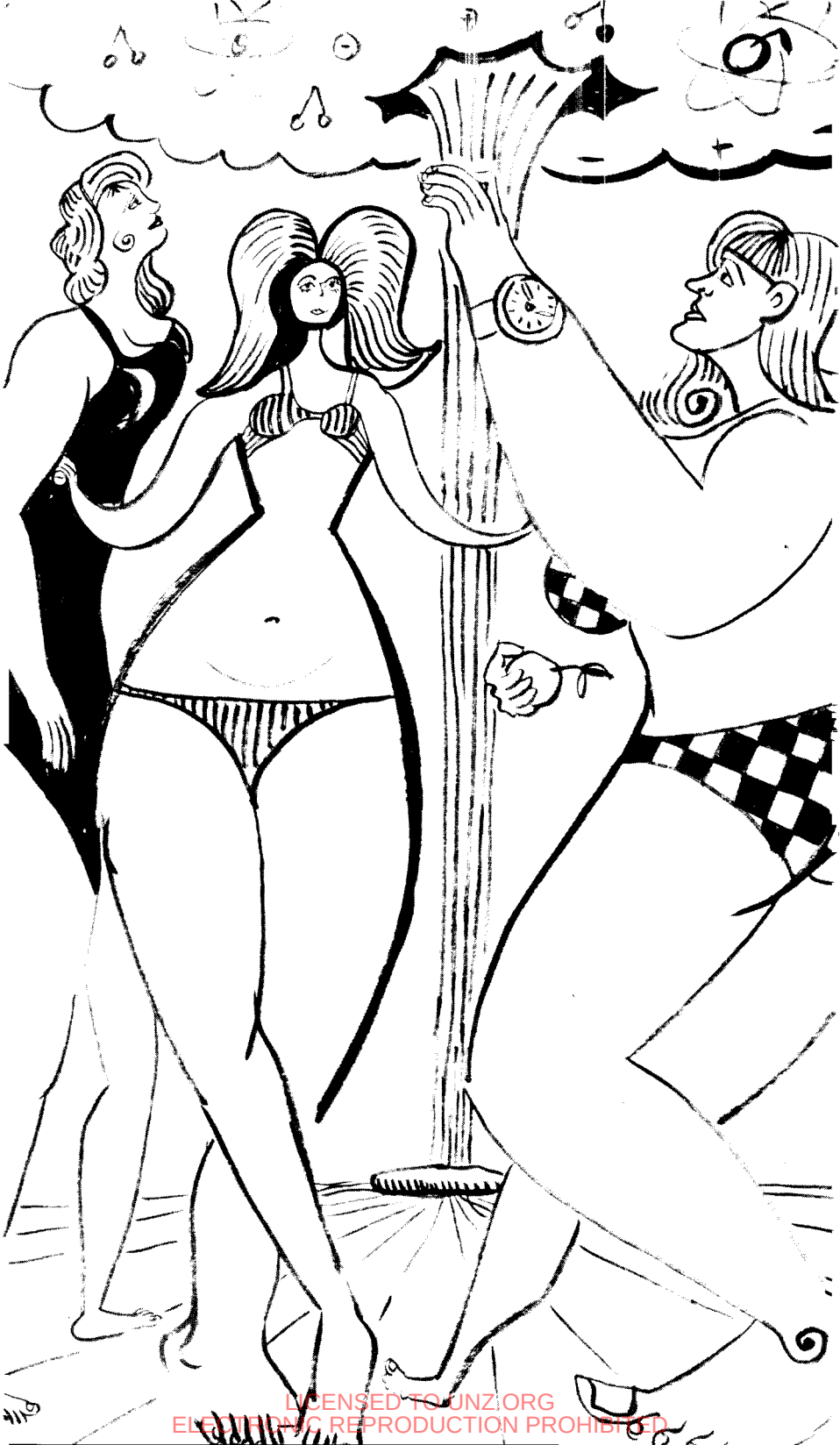
As the first theme in exquisite isolation
Loosed from its violin we implored
Quickly come, and not too soon the second
Slid with delicate outcry on its mate,
And both, it seemed, stretched out
Their necks with water-weeds hung,
While on your right hand, mariner,
Burned the North Sea.

If this be not major music, live with it
a little while, live with it in the arms
Of your old love. The ache of gladness can draw tears
And make great memories of minor things
Such as the melodious tide let fall
And the rippling shore revealed.

In death be aware of us, sad Irishman,
Once, having need of joy
We both made much of you, John Field.

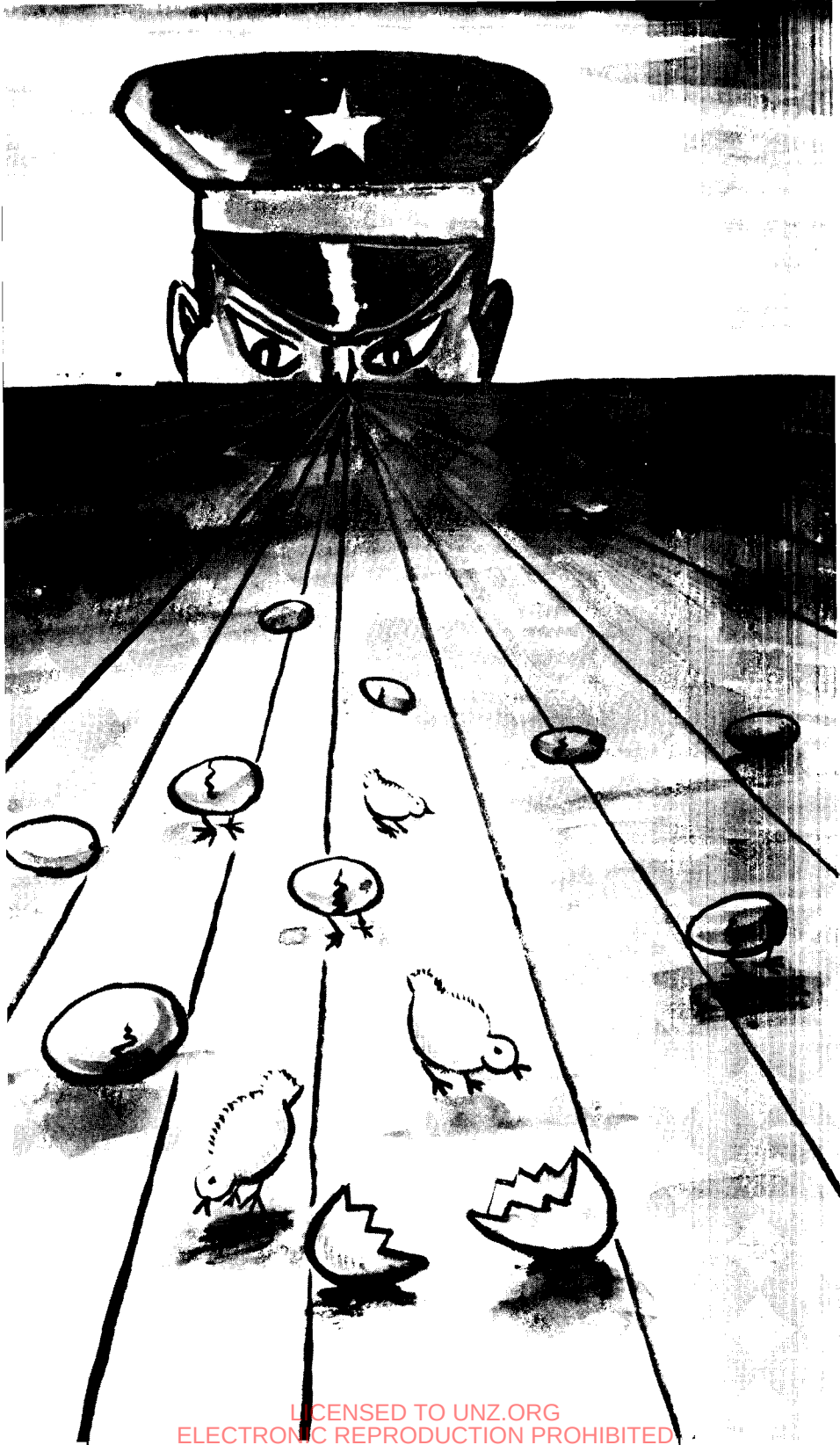
Chilam Tune



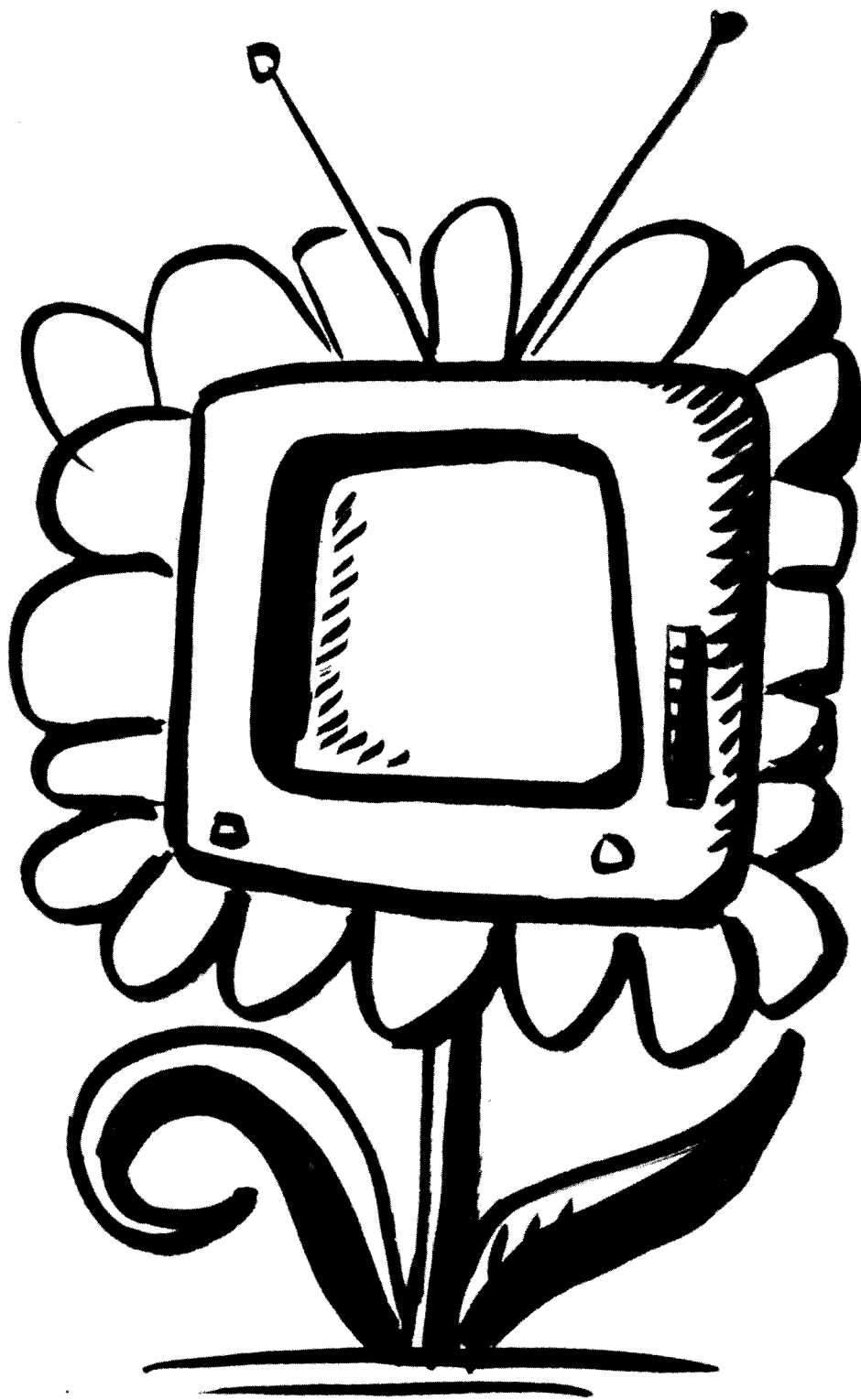








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Proceedings: Truman Capote

James Dickey

Every year during what are called the "proceedings" at the annual meeting of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, commemorative tributes to members who have died during the year are read. Last spring, James Dickey offered the tribute to Truman Capote at a dinner meeting in the Academy Meeting Room.

Dickey was somewhat surprised to be asked (which he was by letter) since he barely knew Capote. Indeed, his only firm recollection was a chance meeting in New York's Gotham Book Mart at which—as Southerners tend to do—the two talked about relatives: Capote had an aunt "up 'round Buford way."

"You'll have to ask the Academy why they picked me to do Truman. I've given one of these tributes before up there, but I'm damned if I can remember who it was for. I get them mixed up with the recommendations I've written trying to get fellowships for people.

"Still," Dickey recalls, "I felt, when asked, I ought to pick up the gauntlet, get up there, and try. I worked on it right hard, because I wanted to say some things about Capote that people would not have thought about him . . . to go in there along with what everyone did think about him."

What James Dickey said follows.

With certain deaths a double vision sets in among the living; there is no escaping it. When a noted person has just died, there is that gap, that disparity, that possible sameness with regard to what the press, in all its clamorous efforts to summarize, finds fit to say, and a kind of private estimate in the mind of each of us. If the person is someone we knew or admired, or disliked, we are inexorably drawn—or driven—to the press to see how the public summation compares with ours. Speaking for myself, I was deeply shocked and terrified at the death of Truman Capote, and like others went to the newspapers to see what the world felt about him. I was afraid of what I would find, and I was not mistaken. The journals I read, some of them quoting friends and acquaintances of the deceased, were of the opinion that, though Capote was a writer of real ability who had produced a best-seller from which a movie was made, he had ruined himself—his talent along with his health—for money and publicity.

It would be foolish to deny the International-Café-Society, jet-set, Beautiful-People, name-dropping Capote, or to downplay this aspect of his life. If we don't include it, we are not really talking about the person who existed. I was never bothered, myself, by this side of Truman Capote's career—that is, the careerism—but always rather enjoyed from afar the intimations of the fabulous that it contained. If there is any magic in American life, it is to be found where great sums of money are spent in groomed and luxurious settings which exist for exposure and pleasure: a corrupt and debilitating magic, but the only one in which our culture truly believes. Scott Fitzgerald was right, far more perceptive than Hemingway in the famous exchange, when he said that “the very rich are different from you and me.” They are, and *how* they are different fills the magazines, the newspapers, the films and television every day we go into the world that surrounds us.

In regard to this last medium, incidentally, I think of the opportunities that the life and career of Truman Capote could give to the literature of soap opera! Could a man—a young man many took, for years of his adulthood, to be a child—born in the South, product of a broken home, shunted around

among relatives in obscure villages, cultivate in secret a literary talent which would bring him into international society, a close acquaintanceship with movie stars, high politicians and their wives, millionaires and millionaire hostesses on four continents? *Could* such a thing happen to a writer, particularly if he were a *good* writer, introspective and poetic in the true rather than the conventional sense? It seems unlikely, and yet something like this happened, and is the only case of its kind. Strange indeed, and unignorable.

As I said, my response to all this was more favorable than not; at least *one* of us had made it! I remember enjoying public photos of Capote, who had written "Miriam" and "The Headless Hawk," disporting with selected friends on the rocks of Taormina, and dancing cheek-to-cheek with Marilyn Monroe, rich and famous as few writers are — again, few *good* ones. I lived this part of Capote's existence with considerable vicarious relish, when I was not devilled with envy, a dark shape usually somewhere in the background. To wear a white sequined mask at one's own ball at the Plaza *and* to have written "The Headless Hawk," too, the real and private accomplishment underlying the publicity, the money and the pleasure! Where else would you find it?

Yet a reaction against the talk-show Capote, the masked-ball Capote, was inevitable, and Capote suffered from it more than he should have had to. The notoriety, the campy put-on quality of some of the episodes, the cattiness, the public fights, the lawsuits — all of those things were regarded by many as evidence of a falling-off, a sellout, a deterioration, a waste, a betrayal, an outrage, a tragedy. But were they? Were they *entirely* so?

Unfulfillment continues in the mind. I cannot help being reminded, for example, of certain parallels between the situations of Truman Capote and Marcel Proust. I am not talking about performance — that would be ridiculous — but of the similar opportunities that both writers had for observing at first hand and at length the crumbling-away, the loss of morale and sense of consequence, the desperate and defiant secret lives, the hyperactive despair and ruinous lack of self-discipline of the monied class of our time: of being highly observant and

intelligent witnesses to the Decline of the West itself, spies in the house of Trimalchio. This is, I realize, a lot to charge Truman Capote with having the ability to carry off in any such manner as did Proust; the four published excerpts of his unfinished novel, *Answered Prayers*, are not strong evidence that he had either the capacity or the desire. Yet I continue to be haunted by the undone, the opportunity. Proust's world, various and multi-layered, is, even so, limited to a very small segment of the population, and geographically confined to Paris and a few small French villages. In contrast, Capote had the chance to observe the glittering process of decay at work in many places and kinds of situations, many climates, many languages. And he had talent as well, of a different order and scope than Proust's, it is true, but plenty of it just the same. He had the will, when he wanted to use it, and he had the vantage point, an overview of a doomed society that very few have, or have ever had: the Death of the Soul in America, Italy, France, Africa, Russia, all over the place! *What* a death, and what a work of literature might have resulted!

All speculation, indeed, but death brings on and encourages speculation as nothing else can. Could Capote have done something like this? If one surmises that he might have come to attempt it, what would be the factor that caused him to try? The belief in his own talent. Did this exist? It did; indeed it did.

The talent of Truman Capote: that is where we can engage him, all speculation aside. This small childlike individual, this self-styled, self-made, self-taught country boy—what did he teach himself? To concentrate: to close out, and close in: to close *with*. His writing came, first, from a great and very real interest in many things and people, and then from a peculiar frozen detachment that he practiced as one might practice the piano, or a foot position in ballet. Cultivated in this manner, his powers of absorption in a subject became very nearly absolute, and his memory was already remarkable, particularly in its re-creation of small details. He possessed to an unusual degree this ability to encapsulate himself with his subject, whatever or whoever it might be, so that nothing else existed except him and the other; and then he, himself, would begin to fade away and words would appear in his place: words concerning the subject, as

though it were dictating itself. In the best of his work, this self-cancelling solipsism, if this be not too self-contradictory an estimate, amounted to Truman's vision of things, and he could call it into service under any circumstances, and with any person, from Marlon Brando or Isak Dinesen to Bobby Beausoliel in San Quentin or Perry Smith on Death Row in Kansas. All Truman's work was a result of this power of isolation-with, of concentration and super attention. His journalism, including his so-called "non-fiction novels," was made possible by means of it, but I prefer to speak of a deeper, more lasting thing than the pursuit of fact allows, and look, if only momentarily, at what came to Truman in the form of words when he closed not with Marilyn Monroe or Perry Smith, but with himself and his own life: what words then took the place of *him*?

Words standing for one of the purest and most generally-felt conditions of our human time, or of any human time: isolation, loneliness, forsakenness, lostness: the lostness that tends to hallucination, dementia, paranoia: "The notion of some infinitely gentle/ Infinitely suffering thing," but which also, taking as refuge and resource the imagination, calls another order of being into play, into existence:

"You ever see the snow?"

Rather breathlessly Joel lied and claimed that he most certainly had; it was a pardonable deception, for he had a great yearning to see bona fide snow; next to owning the Koh-i-noor diamond, that was his ultimate secret wish. Sometimes, on flat boring afternoons, he's squatted on St. Deval Street and daydreamed silent pearly snowclouds into sifting coldly through the boughs of the dry, dirty trees. Snow falling in August and silvering the glassy pavement, the ghostly flakes icing his hair, coating rooftops, changing the grimy old neighborhood into a hushed frozen white wasteland uninhabited except for himself and a menagerie of wonderbeasts: albino antelopes, and ivory-breasted snowbirds; and occasionally there were humans, such fantastic folk as Mr. Mystery, the vaudeville hypnotist, and Lucky Rogers, the movie star, and Madame Veronica, who read fortunes in a Vieux Carré tearoom. "It was one stormy night

in Canada that I saw the snow," he said, though the farthest north he'd ever set foot was Richmond, Virginia.*

I find myself returning often to *Other Voices*, *Other Rooms*, but more often to the shorter pieces of *The Tree of Night*, and I believe I do this because I think of Capote's gift as essentially lyrical, poetic: the stamp-minted event, the scene stunning with rightness and strangeness, the compressed phrase, the exact yet imaginative word, the devastating metaphorical aptness, a feeling of concentrated excess which at the same time gives the effect of being crystalline. One can say of these stories, like "Miriam" and "Shut a Final Door," which in other hands would bear too many resemblances to Gothic movies, with lots of melodrama, props, grotesque stage businesses, that they are saved by the only quality that can save any writer's anything: his personal vision, which in Capote's case runs to unforgettable images of fear, hopelessness, and dream-death: in addition to cold, also its opposite: airlessness, heat, ripe rot, the submerged corpse green in the moveless pool.

It is maybe paradoxical, but not finally so, that such images—many of his best—of the stultified, the still, the overhot and overripe come like the others from Truman Capote's lenslike detachment, and suggest, rather than lushness and softness, things wrought by the engraver's delicate hammer, the artist working with otherworldly intensity upon materials *from* the world, as the universe makes a snowflake, the most fastidiously created of artifacts, resulting in a true work of literature, which, unlike the snowflake, keeps on existing. The sure-handed crystal-making detachment, the integrity of concentration, the craft of the artist by means of which the intently human thing is caught, Truman Capote had, and not just at certain times but at all times. This we remember, and will keep, for it gave us what of him will stay. Keep him we will, and from such a belief come these few lines, something,

* Truman Capote, *Other Voices*, *Other Rooms* (New York: Random House, Inc.), 1948.

To Be Done In Winter By Those
Surviving Truman Capote

What you hold,
Don't drink it all. Throw what you have left of it
Out, and stand. Where the drink went away
Rejoice that your fingers are burning
Like hammered snow.

He makes no sound: the cold flurries, and he comes all the way
Back into life; in the mind
There is no decay. Imagine him
As to behold him, for if you fail
To remember, he lies without
What his body was.

His short shadow
Is on you. Bring him in, now, with tools
And elements. Behold him

With your arms: encircle him,
Bring him in with the forge and the crystal,

With the spark-pounding cold.

Be Careful What You Want

William Kittredge

Pinkie and I had come three days from Montana to camp among the aspen at elevation on Steens Mountains, right near the top of southeastern Oregon, up where we used to live. My sister Grace had lured us along the road with talk of serious family medicine.

"This one is Vito," Grace said, and I figured, Yeah, that one is Vito. We had heard about Vito on the telephone. Just one sober Sunday morning telephone call. Grace was in love again, and out of money.

And this lad with all the rings on his fingers, and no shirt in sight, that had to be Vito. Maybe twenty-six, twenty-eight or twenty-nine, and too many rings, grinning like he was shy as a new dog and just coming on curlyheaded while Grace did the talking, a nice fellow, and suntanned as a water-ski addict. The kind you find everywhere, when you've got a dollar in your pocket.

After I sold the ranch where we all used to live, Grace located herself in Santa Fe. This Vito, she said, owned a motel called The Submarine, a pretty good name for an establishment out in the highlands of the New Mexican desert. Grace

was moving her gallery-shop into his building. Like Pinkie said, in that mean little streak she can show, "Paying to hook up her business."

"Vito, you come over here," Grace said. "These are your new relatives, sort of."

Travels like a race horse, that's what they used to say when Grace was running her roads. And here she was, lean and sun-dark like she keeps herself, wearing a pair of those wide-hipped white shorts she has learned to favor, precisely clean and ironed, but real short. Grace . . . those chorus-girl legs on a woman turning forty-three, the little purple flecks from broken veins hardly noticeable, mud on her feet, posing again.

Grace touched her tongue to her teeth.

"Our Woman," as my father liked to call my mother, had named Grace out of hope. "So maybe she'd be different than the rest of us," my mother'd said. "But it's goddamned hopeless." My mother was one of those ranch women who insisted on her right to go horseback after cattle while some hired lady kept the house. But she's given it up now; she lives on a mountaintop overlooking the Pacific Ocean and Los Angeles. She is active in the politics of the Sierra Club and the Nature Conservancy, and she blesses me for selling the property. "Otherwise," she says, fixing me with those blue British eyes, "I'd of died on the son-of-a-bitch."

All the time since we drove up, this Vito has been leaning against Grace's little buff-colored two-seater Mercedes with the top off—Grace always did like to travel light. One thing you would never imagine in the horseback days was a thirty-thousand-dollar automobile within a mile or so of the highest falloff from the Steens.

The mountain is one of those fault-block shelves the deep pressures of earth have tilted up in that rimrock country, the western slope rising through thirty miles of juniper and long grasslands to near ten thousand feet at the ridge, which is edged with rotten drifted snow until late August. You stand up there at daybreak, and the huge distance across the sagebrush deserts to other mountains is home. You could fall into it. The great

eastern rockfall drops through most of a mile to the white alkaline playa of the Alvord Desert. One long running step, and you could be gone. It's always there.

The aspen were turning. Come morning there would be a rim of ice around the water bucket. Some of the leaves were lime green and others dead fading yellow in the late sun. Off some seventy miles toward the low sun I could see the shadow of Bidwell Mountain in northeastern California. At one time we ran close to seventy-five hundred mother cows between here and there.

"We got business," I said to Grace. "You and me." That Vito was coming out of his slouch, and Pinkie got down from the Blazer to come stand beside me. Good old large-hearted Pinkie, gone thinner over the years, her moss-red hair tight to her head—gone to wire and bone she says—looking like she was blinded by the sunset. And here comes this Vito, barefoot and limping over to meet us. Pray for rain.

"Pleased," Pinkie says. "Real pleased." She stepped right out in front of me, like she will at any echo of hostility. It's a sign of common sense I have learned to recognize and allow over the years. "Business can wait," she said. "We better have a drink. Everybody is dusty."

Pinkie and I do our drinking once the sun is going down. Mostly gin, from half-gallon bottles with plastic pour-spouts. Pinkie has her horses and I have my workshop, good hard-handed things to do on our two hundred and eighty acres of timothy and orchard grass along a year-round creek on the west side of the Bitterroot Valley in Montana. It's the perfect place we found after eighteen months of dealing with real estate brokers all over the western side of America—a fringe of tamarack and Douglas fir on the high side where we border the Selway Wilderness, and those mountains gleaming in the sun after the first snowfall. Who could say enough?

We sold the ranch, and we got what we wanted. Not that we are so entirely local. For a time Pinkie read travel books, and we flew out to know the world. France and Spain and London and Mexico. But we settled. Sometimes you do the right thing.

It's a privileged life not many people see, but it means you have to invent your own desires to take a chance on losing your nerve and drifting into the kind of crack-up you read about in newspapers. Some son-of-a-bitch is always shooting his dogs and claiming it was done on instructions from God. So I work in my shop to suit myself. It's another privilege.

In the dark of very early morning I brew myself the exotic coffee Pinkie buys from catalogues, and I read. Sounds like a schoolyard thing to say, but I was the only man in our part of eastern Oregon with more than one hundred books in his house, and now I have maybe a thousand. *The Divine Comedy* with those old horrific full-page pen-and-ink illustrations, left from the library my great-grandfather brought in a covered wagon from Illinois along with a *Book of Common Prayer* so fragile with age I don't open it any more. *Harney County Oregon and Its Range Land* by George Francis Brimlow. *The Handbook of North American Indians, Volume IX, Southwest*, published by the Smithsonian Institute. Books about real items, which are not boring.

Grace found something in New Mexico, I'll give her that. She's the one first showed me those bowls from the Mimbres Valley in southern New Mexico. The natives made them to be used one time in the burial of the dead, and decorated them with designs which show dancing birds or geometry going around and around—so they end up back at themselves—which is true no matter what else you might believe or see in the world.

The bowls were fitted over the faces of the dead in their graves, and a small hole was knocked in the bottom so the dead could breathe. Pinkie doesn't know everything there is about me. And Grace sold those bowls from the Mimbres Valley. It was her specialty. So you have to think twice about her.

At sunup in Montana I like to be outdoors, watering the heavy banks of flowers around our log house, setting stage for the fine warmth of afternoon and the honeybees and hummingbirds. I hose down the stonework patio, and then go to what smattering of field work there is connected to such small acreage. Before long I'll be in the doorway to my workshop, smelling

the steel and the brass and the memory of hot oil before turning to the lovely humming of the lathe. What I do is repair antique guns. I rebores those old rifles so perfectly. Some say I ruin them. But I do not sell them. They stay with me. One precise thing and another. The sun tips until the oiled plank flooring in my shop lies like its own world under long fingers of light from the back windows. And then Pinkie comes in from her horses, and we have earned a drink of gin.

"One drink," Grace said, and she gave off that little breathy laugh we know so well. I cracked open the back of the Blazer, and got into my ice chest where the Tanqueray and lemons were cold and heavy and waiting. Pinkie dug our crystal glasses from the padded leather case, and I rattled the hard ice and poured that thick clean odor of gin from the bottle. Such times are a good excuse for life.

"You!" Grace said. She was looking at me. "Before anything, now, you shake hands with Vito. Maybe we will have a drink, then. Just maybe."

So I did it like a soldier, took his hand, which was dark and dry and hard enough to make you wonder where he did his work, and Grace just fluttered her fingers in that old way, taking her first sip of gin. And her man, this Vito, he lifted his drink in that strong hand, and he finally said something, in an accent which must have come from Europe. "Praise," he said. "Praise to every one thing."

"So you and me, old sister," I said to Grace, "we are going to take ourselves a ride, and talk our business in private." That fellow Vito looked like I had hit him with a stick.

"You kids!" Pinkie said. She edged over to that Vito and got her thin freckled arm around his naked waist. "Don't take it so hard," she said, hugging him. "You got me." I had to wonder if his flesh felt dry. She looked up to him, and snapped her fine little teeth together a couple of times, like a bright country flirt.

Pinkie can surprise you. Anybody else you might wonder, but Pinkie has been my wife since I joined the Air Force after my junior year of Animal Husbandry at Oregon State, and she

has been faithful to me in whatever counts, so far as I know, and I cherish her for it like you do the place where you want your ashes scattered. But I have never been able to read her mind.

"You want to go, or not?" I said, looking to Grace, and she turned to her man and lifted her hands like she was helpless and even sad, but going anyway, and he finally smiled, all the bright teeth in the world.

"Damned good idea," he said in that accent. I have to wonder at how arrogant we must have looked to one another before he reached out and took my hand in his dry grip. His eyes were soft as a boy's while I closed up the tailgate on the Blazer, and then me and Grace were gone, casting a long roostertail of dust.

"Here we are," Grace says, and she looks at me like nothing profound has changed in our way of negotiating distances. Grace and I been down that path a couple of times before.

Finally home is how it seemed when we were running those long late afternoon miles, both of us balancing our glasses of gin and nothing to say with the hot wind blowing in our faces as we came off the mountain and out onto the asphalt, simply driving and not going anywhere but home.

Let me tell you my hands were shaking as I stopped the Blazer and stood looking out over that land where I used to work, trying to light a cigarette, all the world I should have ever cared about around me and untouchable as dreams you can't remember in the morning. So I lifted my warming glass of gin. There was nothing to say. Every one of us has places to go sightseeing in our own history, once we come of age, and those backroads were it for Grace and me.

Three generations of our people lived out in that landlocked country where nothing flows to the sea and everybody takes care of their own individual selves. Which is the way we lived until Pinkie and I came to understand we were rich if we took the money. Seemed so easy. You could turn the life into money—a suitcase full of traveler's checks, like Pinkie said one time, new rubber on all four wheels—and travel away to some place where you didn't need to know the history of anybody but yourself. All the first-class airplane tickets you want.

My great-grandfather came to the valley as a single-room

schoolteacher, my grandfather ran borrowed-money cows on the free desert and gave the whole of his life to acquiring property, and my father negotiated those ranchlands to perfection—eleven thousand acres of wild swampland hay meadow and eight thousand diked and drained and irrigated acres of peat-ground barley farming. There was good luck connected, but we left that valley running like a tuned machine whose bloodstream is water. You could pump the water back to the high ditches and irrigate again and again in our system until the water wore out. At least that was our old joke.

But there was nothing humorous about crouching close on a June morning with the barley seedlings coming up in drill rows against the sunlight, yellow-green and new and lifting and falling across the cultivated tule beds. That stink of decay and liquid nitrogen fertilizer was nothing funny at all. Memories of such ownership will draw you back, you have to know.

And there we were, me and Grace, flying down that two-lane highway which cut through the home fields. The fences were tight and the gates were closed, the ditches clean and the barley ready to harvest—all of which could make you crazy, somebody else owning property which used to be yours as much as your own body. Unless you do like I do, and learn to think of those ranchlands as a pure creation made to last. Such works don't belong to anybody but themselves.

We crossed the meadowlands of the Island Ranch and the Bell A with the bugs crusting on our windshield, and the Buena Vista, and the Sod House where my father made his start working for his father—we were paying respects—all down the long valley of the Donner und Blitzen River where Peter French established the first civilization north of the Southern Pacific Railroad in his white saw-lumber house.

Grace went in to the old rock-walled store at Diamond while I just sat there studying my hands, hoping nobody saw me. You don't sell your interest in such a country and keep many friends. Grace came back carrying a case of long-necked Budweiser bottles, a handsome adult woman lugging that case of beer like she knew how things worked in this part of the world if she didn't know another thing, and surely she was home

there as the last light of afternoon touched her, and the lilac bushes and cottonwood around the old buildings stayed luminous.

"Anybody you know?" I asked, and Grace just nodded real seriously, like sure she saw somebody she knew, and I figured she knew somebody in every one of those country stores within a hundred miles as she snapped the tops off two of those bottles and let the cold beer froth over her hand. Night was coming down as we drifted on at eighty and ninety miles an hour along roads which had turned to gravel, flipping bottles at the road signs which began to glitter back at us in the headlights, and I was recollecting country dances and the stunned ride home after sunrise, that sort of thing—you had to be there.

On the northern extremity of that landlocked valley a great lava-rock escarpment lifts some couple of thousand feet above the swamps, and close in at the foot there is a channel called The Narrows, where the run-off water from the Blitzen River escapes to evaporate in one alkaline pothole lake after another. Those narrows were sacred ground to the digger Paiute Indians in ancient days. On the smooth-sided boulders, which must have come loose and rumbled down from the cliffs in some old shake of the earth, those lost natives painted their wiggly stick-figure pictures of snakes and men and suns—which must have represented days of travel or good luck to their thinking—and you could pick up a pocketful of fine little chipped obsidian arrowpoints down in the tules along the big slough, at least on a dry fall, before the anthropology students got there.

My people never paid mind to such things, but I valued them, and hunted arrowheads there in the silence on afternoons in October while the waterbirds came in from breeding on the Canadian tundra. Mostly I gave the points away, which was a damned fool thing to do. Should have left them where I found them, for what good that would have done. The flower beds where Pinky and I lived were lined with the stone bowls

native women used for grinding their seeds into flour, and I don't want to know who has carted them off since we left.

All the way from Montana I had promised myself some time at The Narrows. What I had in mind was leaning back on one of those painted boulders and breathing history. There were days when I could have been a digger Paiute myself, crouching out of sight in the tules and never minding the wait until those rafts of birds came in to set their wings and drop to the slow water. I've spent more than one afternoon out there being someone else, never moving, and now in the twilight I wanted a go at another old game—the pleasure of being John C. Fremont as he told of celebrating Christmas of 1843, camped at The Narrows with his troop of U.S. Army on their way to California through the pure antique wilderness and isolated from all they knew, jittery in the presence of so much pagan sign on the day of His Birth. That's the way Fremont says it in his journal, *His Birth*. They drank off what brandy they had, ration after ration, and fired their howitzer.

What I wanted to hear was that howitzer booming and booming, round after round into the snowfall of 1843, and the thousands of redhead ducks and teal and mallards and snow-geese and Canada honkers all lifting to flight and clamoring as they will in those great heedless accumulations, the air sighing with the sounds of their wings, and those mostly middle-European immigrant enlisted men gabbering in another clamor as they drank their brandy from a single tin cup passed hand to hand, and wished they were drunk. Grace and I had started this run up on the Steens like we had business to talk, and here we went, on what would sound like a childhood sort of venture, if you had to worry.

But it was not to be. There was an old fart camped there in his home-built trailer. Couldn't have come from far away, not pulling that rig with a three-quarter-ton '56 Dodge.

Greasy old man, like you see, sitting there enthroned in an aluminum lawn chair, a half-gallon of home-brew wine beside him, stoking at a pipe the way those old bastards do when they

want you to know they are not going to hurry themselves for anybody. He was all by himself in the endlessness of desert twilight and nobody to talk at but a nervous little wild-eyed Australian sheep dog. The dog would have been worth three hundred dollars to anybody with sheep to herd. But hell no, this dog is a pet.

"They was here," the old man says, once our dust was settled, never bothering to stand. "You sure got some friends." He grinned when he had finished this say-so, and clamped his white store-bought teeth down on that pipe the way those old men will, like he was final in all he might know, him and God.

"Shooting rifles," he says, and then he stands, and I could see he was wearing one funny-looking boot, the sole built up high for one leg, which was shorter than the other. "Shooting tin plates like they was somebody. The sons a bitches."

"Yeah," I said, like this made sense.

"Well," he said. "They sure as hell didn't kill any time waiting for you." He was pointing his pipe toward a cheatgrass hillslope, and glaring like he could see them yet.

"Piss poor friends," he said.

"You should have a drink," Grace says, holding what was left of our gin and not so much slurring her words as speaking a little carefully. "You could use a drink."

She was coming at the old man in her pushiest nursemother way, and I should have got things stopped right there. I should have got Grace back into the Blazer and given up on ideas about John C. Fremont.

"You got any George Dickle? the old man asked, and Grace laughed like she couldn't get enough of his surprising ways, and sipped at warm gin from the bottle.

"Budweiser," she said, and she wiped at her mouth with the back of her hand. With my headlights shut off I could see the land-shadow of Steens Mountain looming dark against a sky that was coming full of stars, and I searched for some sign of a campfire among the aspen. But no. Must have been too far away.

The old man sat down again. "Shooting and drinking," he said. His big false-plate smile, all manufactured teeth, looked

to glow a little in the dim light. "I got a bottle of Dickle," he said. "If that girl would help a crippled man, and pull it out of the trailer in there, on the counter."

"Girl?" Grace says. "Kiss my ass." But she was at the door handle, after the whiskey. Watch out for a crippled man.

We passed his bottle, and followed with shots of beer. "Them assholes," the old man said. "Shooting holes in every damned thing."

Grace just shrieked. "Assholes! You are the asshole. We never heard of them people." She was sounding gone in a way I had forgot, and should have remembered. You get Grace drinking and you have got the consequences.

The old man squinted his eyes like he had never seen such a mouth on a woman, and her face showed a little slippage as she went to stammering, like some switch in her brain had flipped. We had been there before.

"I seen you plenty of times, darling," he said, talking straight up to Grace like she was his specialty. "I worked over there in the Caterpillar shop, on the ranch." As he talked the old man kept rubbing at the warm glowing bowl of his pipe, and his thick fingers were knotted by a life of broken and mended bone, the nails black for life and mostly not there. He stank of the sweat and diesel like the real thing out of those heavy-duty mechanic shops, and there was little doubt which ranch he was talking about. "No reason you should remember," he said, still courting humiliation with Grace. "But I seen you driving up and down the road in that Buick, top down in November, four or five trips a day, like you was on a serious business."

From the sounds of things I must have hired him once, and paid him wages. He sure had the line on Grace. Let too many people work for you, and after a while you got nothing but enemies.

"No wonder," he says.

"No wonder what?" Grace had herself somewhat back together. I was thinking this old fart better watch out for himself.

"No wonder you come out here dressed like some Broadway

woman. You ought to stand still and take a look at yourself. You people always thought you owned the country."

"We did," Grace says. "The whole damned thing. Any damned thing you would want." She was down close to his face, like she couldn't quit smelling him, and I was wondering if Grace actually believed in such delusion.

"In a whore's armpit." The old man was coming out of his chair, and I don't blame him much. Grace was ready to strike with that whiskey bottle. But I was poised and just twisted it out of her hand, jerking and feeling a sharp little snap which might have been a bone in her wrist. For that hesitation I thought something was broken.

It is always remarkable how anger can seep into you without any warning, and then you have cracked some man on the skull, or broke somebody's arm, and you are standing there pumped up and no place to go but home. The truth is, you could kill somebody. For such reasons I confine my drinking to gin in the evening, with Pinkie. Or try to. It seems like a lesson you have to learn over and over, every couple of years.

"You people were nothing but a chicken-shit circus," the old man said, "all your lives." Now he was glaring straight up in my face, that little jumped-up son of a bitch, and I could feel the spray from his shouting. I could have killed him. Beat him down with that bottle and drove away. So damned easy.

One move like that and your life is gone. You have to keep track of what it is you want from the world, and always catch yourself. I dropped the bottle to rattle on the gravel at the old man's feet, next to that white-eyed Australian sheep dog, who was studying us all without ever having moved. For another time I valued Montana, where nobody had ever worked for our wages and never would. And could kiss my ass if I was rich or poor.

Such possibilities must have been there in my look. The old man stepped back, dragging that heavy foot in the gravel, his face gone soft and willing. "Augh, the hell," he said. "There's nothing so bad." And then I knew him.

The name just came to me, and I said it. "Whitney

Bosworth." Once it came, I knew him close. Hard to imagine how so much of life can go blank out of your mind. This old man had worked for my father when they were both young men, and my father first brought the Caterpillar tractors into the country, to plow out the tule ground. I could see his name written into those old payroll books in my father's round schoolboy handwriting. "He's one of them bunkhouse lawyers," my father said. "Work themselves to death if you catch 'em right." This was a man who insisted on his proper name, Whitney.

"God all hemlock," the man said, and he was grinding his store-bought teeth. "Why the hell couldn't you keep anything straight?" He clenched his pipe hard in his mouth and took my hand in one of those hard calloused hands of his. For all the steel I have hammered in my hobbies, he was stronger than me.

Right away we were at each other, grip to grip, and he was solid as cast metal. This Whitney Bosworth had worked two weeks for me in the fall of one year, and I had fired him. He was one of those men who thinks he knows better than the man who writes the checks. We were at that old contest again, and nobody was going to win.

Don't you ever wonder where the sourness started. All my people worked this country like they had a right, and now that old childhood life looks strange in my mind as something out of National Geographic, a place where things are done different than we will ever understand. Those natives painting the rocks with their pictures of the sun and moon while they waited for the waterbirds and John C. Fremont . . . the truth is we never owned one thing worth counting. I could see it in that old man's eyes as we strained at one another. He didn't want nothing of mine. Then his force went limp, and I stumbled forward. He jerked his hand away.

The old man showed those white teeth like he was finally going to be happy, dismissing us with a wave of his thick hand. But then he turned his mouth down in a sour satisfied way while he hammered his pipe against the side of his thick-soled boot, knocking the fire out on the ground. I climbed back into the

Blazer, switched on the headlights, and watched old man Whitney Bosworth start packing tobacco into his pipe again, like he was finished with us forever. I thank to God that Grace came scrabbling in on the passenger side without persuasion. Because right then I would have drove off and left her.

No matter how hot the days, the high country in the Steens always goes cold at night. It was full dark when we got back to the foot of the mountain, where the road bridges across the Donner und Blitzen River. Grace had not spoken one word, but she had been sniffing, and you can imagine her with that half-empty case of Budweiser between us, tears running down her face for effect, and mostly sad-assed drunk.

There were times when Grace drank weeks and months in a row, and I couldn't blame her much. She had nothing to get her out of bed on any specific morning. Even with the property, I could get bored in myself. Such disquiet edges at me yet. Here I am, fifty-two years old, and I have managed to keep all the money anyone would ever need inside America, married to somebody fine as Pinkie for an entire lifetime, and it is not enough.

Never has been, not for me, and not for Grace. If that is not dismal and silly. But you figure how it could have been helped with people like us, who got their own way one time too often. Spoiled is what Pinkie says, when she is being hard on Grace. And she is talking about me, I know it.

But no matter, I couldn't listen to that sniffing, and I parked alongside the bridge across the Donner und Blitzen, the headlights showing out over the ripple of water and into the willows on the far side.

"Get your ass out of there," I said, after I had walked around and opened the door on her side.

"No," she said, in a pouty little voice. "Grace," I said. "We got to sober up. It's a real simple thing. We got to wash our faces."

"You'll drive away."

"Here's the keys," I said. "You got the keys. Nobody can drive away without you." I took her hand, which was wet from rubbing at her eyes, and I gave her the keys to the Blazer. There

was a spare ignition key stuck to a magnet under the hood. I'd never give away my last key. I have seen people throw a set of keys far as they can, out into a creek, leaving everybody afoot.

We made our way across a gravel bar to the water, me holding Grace so she didn't fall, and we crouched there like a couple of raccoons in the night, splashing our faces with the cold water coming off those remnants of snowfields. We dried off on the tails of my shirt, which is when Grace caught me looking with a sucker punch.

Think what you will, but Grace is a ranch girl, and she has fought some men in her time. It was a short little punch, with all her shoulder behind it, like I taught her so long ago, right precise into the solar plexus, and I went down to my knees on that gravel bar like a shot hog, sucking at quick breath.

Grace, she's been the long-legged girl, all her life.

"Damn you to the world," she said, when I could finally see her, and she was hard-eyed as you would like there in the headlights. "I'm going to marry him," she said. "Like it or not. He's worth ten of us. You know it." There was nothing to answer.

"Sure you are," I said. We held there a moment, me on my knees, wiping the tears from my eyes, and Grace not giving an inch, and then she reached me her hand. "God damn every one of you," she said.

Grace has been married to five different men, and one of them twice—a high-steel hand named Benji Spaulding. She never talked about Benji any more, and claimed she didn't know where he was gone. Which was no tragedy, however she would play it.

"But he was something," she used to say. "Nothing you could figure, but something." Maybe for her. She married Benji the second time right when Richard Nixon was kicked out of the White House.

Grace was working at the ranch, filling the summer as helper to the bookkeeper, a kind of make-believe job while she got dry from another episode. It was after the Fourth of July, with haying about to start. Grace started home from Burns, the town where our kids would have gone to school if anybody in our generation ever chanced the trouble, hauling a load of fruit

and vegetables she had picked up at the Safeway. Seven hundred dollars worth of fresh produce for the haycamp cook-house. Six days later we found her station wagon parked out back of the old Deer Mount Tavern. The doors were locked and the windows rolled up tight, and that load of groceries was alive and multiplying in the July heat. Had to sell the station wagon. The man who bought it ripped out the upholstery and headliners, and never did get rid of that dead-vegetable stink, so he claimed.

Grace called in collect around the end of August, from Minot in the Dakotas, saying she had met up with Benji in the Safeway and married him again. She was looking for money to come home. And now, Grace, God Almighty—she pulled me close and there we were, resting up against one another on a creek-bank out in another desert night. She was shivering hard enough to shake the rings off her fingers.

“We should go swimming,” she said, and I marched her back to the Blazer. After my first year of agriculture school at Oregon State, where I was flunking things called Elements of Agronomy and Plant Pathology and didn’t give a shit at all, I came home to sit in moon shadows under the willows along this creek after swimming naked with Grace, back in those days when my father was sending her to private school in Arizona, learning her the ways of tea-party grab-ass so far as I could see. Getting her ready to marry outside the property. In our people’s old scheme of things, men inherit, and the women had to marry.

“What they teach you,” Grace said, “is to fuck for your money.” She was a girl just out of childhood and strong-minded from the start, and we sat there on the grass, looking up the hill to the lights of our house, and I hated her, knowing others were already at her, feeling sorry for myself.

After that summer with Grace I went back to Oregon State and married Pinkie out of the Theta house, a big black-and-white tie December ceremony inside the Presbyterian Church, Pinkie glowing and perfect as porcelain in that white immaculate dress as she came toward me. We made our deal with the devil and got away clean, Pinkie and I.

And now in the headlights Grace was smiling like her heart

would shatter, those little tight lines coming together around her eyes like she knew my secrets, and could weep. Talk about swimming. But that is an old story of hers, and I still have to wonder how much she holds me to blame.

"We got it," I said, turning the heater up to high. "Swimming in shit, if we don't look out."

Turns out Grace and her man Vito had brought sleeping bags and no tent, which is proper if you are going to sleep under highland skies, and ski sweaters and woolen socks and slinky silk long-john underwear, all the warmth you would need.

And classical music. Who would think I might find myself transported by that pure lofting of sentiment which I have learned to recognize as a Mozart clarinet concerto, and Vivaldi, and Bach sonatas played on the flute. That two-seater Mercedes has speakers fine enough to shatter crystal, and the music was so loud it seemed to flutter the yellowing leaves.

In our overseas travel, when Pinkie and I were hunting escape from always living on our property, we stayed strangers in strange places, never chancing anything but scrambled eggs for breakfast in places you go with money, Merida in Yucatan, and the lagoons on the west shores of Baja for the whales in February, and France and the northern Atlantic seacoast of Spain so we could crawl deep in those caves where the naked races of man painted their handprints and ancient animals on the walls. What I learned was what I already knew about the value of standing quiet in yourself and breathing easy while the shadows of desert clouds drift so quickly over broken country where you could never walk. It's a thing those old men must have known. Nobody should forget a childhood where they were native in their inclinations. Who would have thought I might have found my lesson about the motions of classical music on the sheeptender's gathering grounds among those aspen trees at that place the old-timers called Whorehouse Meadows.

Sparks from the bonfire were flying to the heavens, and Pinkie and that Vito were dressed for the night, Pinkie in a bright orange and black ski sweater that belonged to Grace, and Vito in a tan flannel shirt anybody might get out of the Orvis cata-

logue. I sat there with my window rolled down, gone for a moment to that music, and thinking where have we come to in this country? Pinkie was smiling like she was glad we were safe.

Grace laid her hand on my arm. "He's a good man," she said. "He does good things." It was only later I learned of his schemes, and their success. You can judge the goodness.

"We opened the wine," Pinkie said, "to breathe."

Whatever his other skills, this Vito is a cook. His name is Vito Stasser, and he lived the first seventeen years of his life in Bombay as the son of a German Lutheran missionary before running away to the Netherlands and London and eventually New Mexico.

"Hippy," he said, and he grinned with all those teeth, looking up from the Dutch oven he had down in the coals, where he was stirring the green chili without beans. We ate a soft cheese warmed by the fire, and a salad of melon and other fruit cut up together in their own juices, and sour thick bread spread with melted butter and garlic and honey, and that green chili, dense with molasses and shredded veal and pork and chunks of marinated lamb and backstrap venison, all tasting of spices from God knows where in Mexico.

The trunk of the Mercedes was packed tight like a Chinese box: four coolers, maybe thirty bottles of wine, saucepans and flatware and big compartmented cafeteria trays. I watched him handle the little pan in which he melted the butter over a bed of coals, and peel cloves of garlic with a kind of quick hard precision. Those dry dark hands. You could imagine him killing his own animals, even chickens, and then butchering. You could tell.

"See," Grace would breathe. "See." I could see, and I kept my mouth shut. There was no need to see. I was always going to give her the money anyway.

We sipped that first bottle of sharp dark wine like adults, and loaded our crackers with a food I never dreamed of, raw elk filet shredded and seasoned the night before, brought to us packed in dry ice.

"He traded the recipe for our dinner last night," Grace said, talking in a proud little voice about the night before in Win-

nemucca, and the Basque restaurant where Vito had bribed the cook into letting him shred the elk filet in a food processor.

Not even Grace was much drunk any more, even though we kept on with the bottles of heavy red wine from France and Spain and Italy and California. This Vito had taken the golden rings with their heavy stones from his thin fingers before he started slicing on the flesh of melons, slipping those rings off one by one like a woman and lining them out like a row of decorations on the padded dashboard of the Mercedes.

"One day we will all come to America," he said, raising his calm gaze to mine with what looked to be perfect innocence. He claims to be German and yet his eyes are brown like those of a meadowland animal.

"My mother," he said, as if he were reading my mind in the way that sometimes happens, "she was related to the Pakistani."

"Probably," I said. When Grace told me he owned that motel called The Submarine I thought of the dark smiling women who come to you at motel desks all over the west these last years, and the smell of their curry-cooking which seeps out into the lobby like a yellow-colored cloud.

"Makes you wonder what they come for," Pinkie said, and I didn't answer because they had surely come for the same things we all wanted, a place to live as you damned well pleased.

"Anyways, if we ain't got the world," Grace says, "who cares?"

Well, nobody, I guess, is the answer to that. You try and figure why it is us who gets the bounty, me and Grace and our people who can make such a sadness of themselves while never letting go. It's simple enough. You just have to be careful what you want.

From the summer I was ten years old my father sent me out to season with the horseback-branding crew. The first morning we were camped at South Corral, a place named after one of those stone-work corrals the mustangers built in the early days. We rode out of the shallow draw with the sun just coming clear of the morning horizon over Steens Mountain, notched there at the highest point like a gunsight, and the drifts of old snow glowing under the new light, and from then on that mountain was a daydream above the deserts in my boyhood.

There have been no bands of sheep on the Steens since the early years of World War I, but those days are famous. The whores in Burns would get bored with all their trade out herding the ten or fifteen thousand head of woolies in the high country, and they would load themselves and big sidewall tents and stocks of whiskey and good food into hired wagons, and move their business out to Mohammed.

You can see it, the tents there at Whorehouse Meadows and the big fires and the herders and those laughing mercantilist women. . . . Without such stories I might as well have spent my days asleep. Listening to Mozart ring in the clean air and watching the sparks from our fire lift to the starry endless heavens I got to thinking my life was all mistakes, and nobody but me had escaped the warm bedroom they'd been born into.

Everybody in his heart knows the same things as my *Book of Common Prayer*. Undreamed shores and crystal cities. I think of my mother down there on her mountaintop overlooking the Pacific, with the coast-to-coast people she has come to know, and I wonder what it is, precisely, she labors to conserve, as if I might be her baby again, learning secrets. "Myself," is all she will say.

Out in the night those full-aged aspen and birch were decorated with an old sign incised into the papery bark—crossed bones and skulls with an elongated string of tears dripping from their eyeholes, wine glasses with slender stems, and whiskey bottles—and spread willing thighs with the simple split peach of vagina and buttocks sliced in between—carved by those summertime women and their herders who were so long gone from the world of ordinary commerce, wounds in the white bark swelling out and distorted where the sap had run and healed. So far from the streets of Burns where houses were being built of proper brick.

I licked my fingers, and stood there casting a long set of shadows in the firelight. "There is one thing," I said to that Vito with what started as good simple spirits, and I went off to the Blazer and came back with my four-battery Police Special flashlight. I led them out into the night like some old ex-

plorer, across through the deep, tangled meadow-grass into the trees, each of us carrying a tumbler of that good red wine and Pinkie bringing along a spare bottle she held by the neck.

Everybody was quiet, and I still cannot name what I meant to show anybody—beyond simple-minded pride of place—as we stumbled out through the leaping shadows away from the fire. So we'll look here, I was thinking, if I could be counted as thinking, here is some down-the-road adult make-believe, a million miles beyond your ordinary uptown commerce.

Even as I see Grace fixed in my blade of light she is tracing her white fingers over the rough festering bark, marking those old incisions, lost in herself and touching her tongue at her lips as she imagined what I wanted them all to see. As if she could taste wood smoke, and the smell of sheep, and all our old inclinations.

But then I couldn't watch her willingness any more, her breath coming shallow, and I shattered my flashlight against one of the tree trunks, a quick back-handed snap of the wrist. I can feel it, the bending of that fragile aluminum tubing, the breaking glass and then darkness and my own breathing in the quiet, and the damned flashlight tossed aside into the tall grass. No one moved, or said anything, or acted surprised. Not that I could see their faces. It seemed at the time I had done the correct, anticipated thing.

We moved on under the starlight over the Steens, our fire small in the distance, the shadows of leaves from the trees dappled over us in the soft illumination from the low moon, and then I went cold for the first time since we sold the property, and began my shaking again, and could not stop myself or hide it.

Reasons for leaving: And here is what I need to look at another time. One midnight in early March, back in the days when I was still a bolt-tightening country man, far out under misting rain on our slippery levee banks, checking my water down by the hundred horsepower Dodson Lake pump, I lost my glue.

Every midnight in the spring season I had to check those pumps, and this was only another night. There in my head-

lights the twenty-four-inch fan of that circular pump ran balanced so perfectly with its fine electrical whirring, and the purpose for everything got lost in the humming, like something forgotten which was foolish and almost a joke because it was gone for the first moments, except that it would not come back.

A simple thing to say. Sounds like losing your grip on a wrench, which falls in its slow startling way, to vanish in the water below. But center yourself in my darkness and rain, and listen to the electric humming, and feel yourself unable to fathom reasons for your hands in the dash lights, and dizzy while the soft rain patters on the roof of the pickup. There was no reason to sit there forever or not. Maybe such happenings are secret to everybody, and never mentioned.

Sounds like foolishness in this telling, but it would not stay laughable. That electric motor spins and there is nothing beyond absolute darkness outside the headlights but the distant incandescent lights of our house — they were flickering as light will come and go when you see it from a porch, through a screen. Pinkie was over there, and that was the only secure thing I could keep at the front of my brain. It's like everything you know can freeze, go under ice, and suffocate. I hung tight onto that steering wheel as I nursed my pickup truck home to Pinkie over those roads which were so greasy with our springtime mud. I tried to light a cigarette and the flame shook like a little animal with its own life.

I can talk of wires running across the world to that pump in its whirling, our canals drawing water downhill from everywhere, the water-rats drawn into the blades of the pump and spewed out into our elegance of fields, and only know my long courtship of some ranchland was over.

Each thing had gone abruptly crystalline, and locked like glass as it hardens. There was nothing to feel, once I was calmed into at least understanding that some things were ended for life. Pinkie thought I was sick with an influenza, and it was only weeks later I told her we were leaving forever soon as I could find a buyer. I never told her the rest, but the third night she came into my bed while I shook, and she slowly made her moves

until she drew me into herself, and helped me down. This is nothing to tell, really, beyond the idea that my life broke. Beyond the idea that it is necessary to be careful who you are.

So we didn't talk, Pinkie and I.

But you can understand Pinkie in her concern as I fell into my jitters there under that night on the Steens. This time it was only the stars bringing their pinholes of light, and Grace fingering at those old cunts carved in the fragile bark of aspen trees.

"Fuckers," Pinkie spat at Grace. "You get out of here." When they were gone off down toward the fire Pinkie took my shirt out of my pants, and undid the pearl snaps and my silver buckle, and her own shirt and her own silver buckle.

Her freckled breasts have never owned a child, but she brought me to them, gasping to her own notion of what was happening. She led me back again in that deep grass, into what she must know to be her perfect home-fire slipperiness, and like always it was cure enough for the time being.

Like nothing ever happened we woke in a feathering of frost on the sleeping bags, and drank steaming coffee from the steel thermos, and wandered our slow way up through the short-grass ravines to stand at the uttermost elevation on the Steens with the glaring sunrise at our backs, seeing how far we could cast shadows before they dissolved. On such perfect September mornings, if there are no forest fires smoking the air from the timber of the faraway Cascades, you can see to five states from the highest ridge-line on the Steens, even north beyond the Columbia River to what they have left of St. Helens in the state of Washington.

The long slopes below the ridge are cut with great cirque canyons left from some age of glaciers, perfect carved walls curving down three thousand feet to the fishing streams with their stands of aspen and willow—Big Indian, Wildhorse, Blitzen, Kiger Gorge. You could think of soaring out from the rim-rock edges like a hard-eyed bird over the inscriptions on earth, the great canyons left by the ice, and the graveled roads and tight-strung fences of our lives.

You could ease down a game trail to the creekside warmth alongside the Blitzen. Think of balancing on the depths of vivid green moss and watching the killdeer run the gravel bars. Herds of mule deer would stand twitching their long ears, regarding these strangers with nothing beyond perplexed curiosity. The animals could lie down with one another. And even that seems too much to ask.

Down there in Santa Fe with enough money to last if she plays it right, Grace has moved her gallery into that motel called The Submarine. Nobody lives in the rooms. Grace and Vito have it given over to a school, where native artists from the pueblos experiment with neon, and epoxy statuary of heroic dimensions. That's what Grace said, last time she called. A red plastic buffalo, big as a Buick. All edged in neon. I ask her what happened to the Mimbres bowls, and she tells me she wants to be in on the invention of things. It's a notion she learned from Vito. I figure he's subtracting her down to nothing she ever was. Where's the goodness in that? But it's his responsibility.

She tells me you have to be able to name what it is makes you crazy. It's you, I told her on that telephone, Grace, it's you.

And everybody laughs. Be careful, we say. Stay hungry. It's the untouched thing keeps you moving. Thank God for me Grace had the good sense to stay humorous so long ago on those summer nights when we came out from swimming. "You boys," she said, and she shook her head, and it was no for life.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Stephen Dixon's most recent novel, *Fall and Rise*, was published this summer by North Point Press; *Time to Go*, a collection of stories, was published by Johns Hopkins University Press in 1984. "Goodbye to Goodbye," which appears in this issue, is the 1985 winner of the John Train Humor Prize.

Virginia Harabin is a recent graduate of Oberlin College. This is her first published story.

William Kittredge won the 1984 Neil Simon Award for his work on the film *Hearland*, the 1984 Montana Governor's Award for Literature, and the Northwest Bookseller's Award for Excellence for his book of stories, *We Are Not in This Together*. In 1986, Graywolf Press will publish a book of his essays, entitled *Redneck Secrets*.

Mona Simpson's stories have appeared in *Ploughshares* and *The Iowa Review*; another is forthcoming in the *North American Review*. She lives in New York and is an editor of this magazine. Her first novel will be published by Knopf.

POETRY

Donald Britton is the author of *Italy*, published in 1981 by Little Caesar Press. He lives in New York.

Lydia Davis translates French literature and is the author of a number of short story collections. She lives in New York.

Carlos Drummond de Andrade, who was born in 1902, is generally consid-

ered the greatest poet of modern Brazil. His selected poems, edited by **Thomas Colchie**, will be published next year by Random House.

Hildegarde Flanner's poems and prose have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Salmagundi* and many other publications. She lives in Calistoga, California.

Jonathan Galassi's edition of the selected essays of Eugenio Montale, *The Second Life of Art*, has been reissued in paperback this fall by the Ecco Press. He is an editor at Random House and the poetry editor of this magazine.

Dana Gioia lives in Westchester County, New York. He and William Jay Smith have just completed a new edition of *Poems from Italy*, to be published by New Rivers Press.

David Lehman lives in Lansing, New York, and writes for *Newsweek*, *The Washington Post*, and other publications.

Phillis Levin's poems have appeared in *Denver Quarterly*, *The New York Arts Journal*, *Pequod*, and the *Virginia Quarterly Review*. She lives in New York City and teaches writing and literature at Queens College.

J. D. McClatchy's new collection of poems, *Stars Principal*, will be published early next year by Macmillan. He teaches at Princeton University and is the poetry editor of *The Yale Review*. He was awarded the 1985 Witter Bynner Prize by the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

Heather McHugh's third book of poems, *Animal*, will soon be published by Wesleyan University Press. She teaches half the year at the University of Washington in Seattle and spends the rest of her time in Eastport, Maine.

Jim Powell is a graduate student in Comparative Literature at the University of California at Berkeley.

Molly Russakoff lives in Philadelphia, where she leads a poetry workshop in a community mental health center and cohosts WXPB's radio program, "The Spoken Word."

John Tarrant, originally from Australia, now lives in Hawaii.

Elizabeth Vreeland's poems have appeared in the *New York Review of Books* and other magazines. She died this past summer after a long illness.

Charles Wright's translation of Dino Campana's *Orphic Songs* was recently published in the Field Translation Series. He lives in Charlottesville, Virginia, and teaches at the University of Virginia.

FEATURES

James Dickey is the author of numerous books of poetry, as well as the novel *Deliverance*. He teaches at the University of South Carolina and is at work on a new novel, entitled *Alnilám*.

Jerzy Kosinski's books include *Steps*, for which he won the National Book Award in 1969, and, most recently, *Pinball* (1982). He is at work on a new novel, entitled *The Hermit*.

INTERVIEWS

Sinda Gregory has published stories, poems, and essays in various journals and is the author of *Private Investigations: The Novels of Dashiell Hammett* (Southern Illinois University Press). She teaches in the Women's Studies Department of San Diego State University.

Larry McCaffery is the author of *The Metafictional Muse: The Works of Coover, Gass and Barthelme* (University of Pittsburgh Press) and coeditor of *Anything Can Happen: Interviews with Contemporary American Novelists* (University of Illinois Press). He teaches American Literature at San Diego State University.

J. D. McClatchy's poetry also appears in this issue. Biographical information is given in the poetry section.

ART

Billy Al Bengston was born in Dodge City, Kansas, in 1934, and lives in Venice, California. His work has been exhibited internationally since 1960, including shows at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Honolulu Academy of Arts, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and James Corcoran Gallery, Los Angeles. A major retrospective exhibition will be held at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, in 1987.

Bruce Charlesworth was born in Davenport, Iowa, in 1950, and lives in Minneapolis. His photographs, videotapes, and installations have been exhibited at P.S. 1, New York, Artists Space, New York, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Mike Kelley was born in Dearborn, Michigan, in 1954, and lives in Los Angeles. His work has been exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Metro Pictures, New York, and Rosamund Felsen Gallery, Los Angeles.

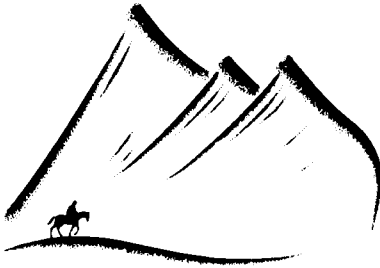
Milan Kunc was born in Prague in 1944 and currently lives in Düsseldorf. Recent one-man exhibitions of his paintings and drawings have been held at the Kunstverein, Düsseldorf, Groninger Museum, Groningen, and Pat Hearn Gallery, New York.

ERRATA

In issue #96 of *The Paris Review*, there are two errors in the **Elizabeth Hardwick** interview. On page 35, Hardwick used the term *Socialist* Realism, which was mistakenly printed as *Social* Realism. Socialist Realism was pronounced by Stalin as a dogma for all Soviet artists in all fields of art. This rigid formula has been more or less obligatory for Soviet writers and artists since 1932.

On page 39, the caption under the photograph of Elizabeth Hardwick and Robert Lowell places the house of F.W. Dupee in Red Bank, New Jersey instead of Red Hook, New York.

On page 169 of the **Rosamond Lehmann** interview, Walter Berry's name is misspelled. It is, indeed, *Berry*, not Barry.



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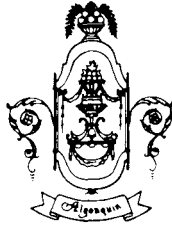
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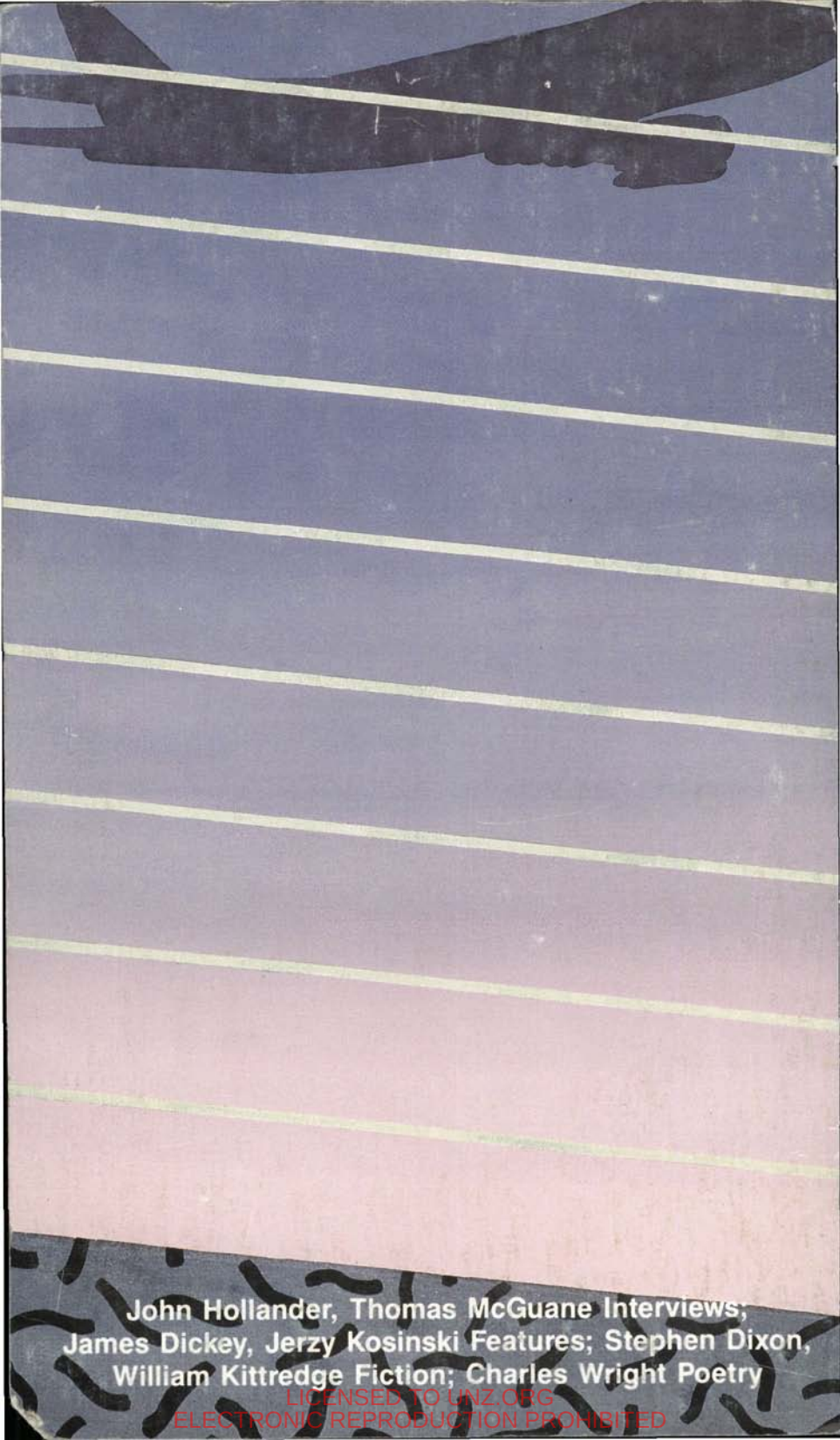
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